

# A HOPE FULFILLED

by

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I have often mentioned — both in articles and in talks to our faithful — the need to establish a modest, but very important institution: an Orthodox Christian theological academy.

You will say to me: "Metropolitan Ephraim, are there not hundreds of such institutions scattered throughout the world?"

The answer, as I have attempted to point out in previous articles and talks, is that all these academies and seminaries are based on an essentially Roman Catholic model. They all have the same academic approach. The professors are trained, more often than not, in non-Orthodox institutions. The textbooks are the same as those used in heterodox schools, or, at least, closely modeled on them. The Roman Catholic and Protestant biases and basic assumptions are all in place, already built into the system. And when the students complete their courses there, they often feel the need to further their studies in other non-Orthodox schools.

This is what I call the "licensed theologian syndrome."

The result, as the famous nineteenth-century Greek preacher, Papoulákos, would say, is that the clergy who are graduated from such academies come out "*furniόν, furniόν*" (batch after batch), like muffins come out of a bakery. With the *pseudomorphosis* (false education) they have received, they will one day gather a Great Council in order to dissolve Orthodoxy, said Papoulákos.

Do we not see this prophecy of Papoulákos fulfilled today?

When you are trained in a heterodox system, as your professors are, and when you use the same textbooks and same methods of instruction, and are taught the same basic biases as the heterodox, then is not Ecumenism the logical destination that awaits at the end of the road?

When you begin to think as they do, you will soon begin to *believe* as they do.

Meanwhile, the real treasure trove of spiritual wisdom sits idle and ignored, gathering dust on the shelves of old monastic libraries. I mean the writings of the Holy Fathers.

It need not be this way.

A *real* Orthodox Christian theological academy would direct its students to genuinely Orthodox Christian sources, such as the divine services of the Church, the works of the Holy Fathers (in translations and in the original language), and the Lives of the Saints. It would direct them toward prayer and fasting, toward the life in Christ, toward love for the holy services and the Holy Mysteries of the Church.

In contrast, the above-mentioned items are often systematically avoided, or shunned, in the academies of "World Orthodoxy." Among the more conservative groups of Orthodox Christians, such institutions are simply non-existent, because these groups are so fragmented and so busy squabbling among themselves about each other's turf.

Now, at long last, after hoping against hope that a truly Orthodox Christian academy might ever come into existence, and talking and writing about it until we were blue in the face, we see that some of our faithful have seen fit to make some very generous contributions which make this worthwhile endeavor not only possible, but a reality!!

As it stood, our diocese house, Saint Philaret House, was getting smaller and smaller, and room for our work was at a premium. It was obvious that we needed something bigger.

Both Bishop Demetrius and I put our heads together and came to the conclusion that we needed an edifice big enough not only for the extra work in our diocese headquarters, but also for our Academy of Saint Symeon the New Theologian.

In an article entitled, "The Academy of Saint Symeon the New Theologian," written about two years ago, I said:

All we need now is one million dollars to buy a house appropriate for this purpose [i.e. an academy], furnish it, and provide an ample library. The million dollars are actually the least of my concerns. If everyone prays hard enough, all this will come to pass, if it is God's will.

Well, somebody, somewhere, was praying hard enough for it to happen, because it did. (For more information about our new St. Philaret House, see *The Faithful Steward*, issue 39).

The Academy will have room for four to five students, possible candidates for the priesthood, who must have finished high school, at least. Their parish priest must send us a letter, citing that the student is attending with his [the priest's] blessing and recommendation. The school day will be

centered on the church services and mostly personal study. There will be a modest fee to cover expenses and the course will last about two years. The students must be unmarried. The curriculum, for the most part, may be found in the article, "The Academy of Saint Symeon the New Theologian." The students would also be expected to help in some household chores: washing dishes, ground work, some [not all] snow removal, etc. The house rules will be under the strict supervision of the bishops and a "house-father". Because boys will be boys, house infractions will result in *epitimia* or expulsion.

It is a simple concept, and it should be adopted by everyone (but, for "World Orthodoxy," and even some "traditional" Orthodox Christian groups, it would be a hard pill to swallow). What many of these good people don't know about Orthodox Christianity would fill several encyclopedias, and some of them seem perfectly content, or self-satisfied, with their ignorance. But that must not be *our* purpose.

So, if you would like to rock the boat, support our Saint Symeon the New Theologian's Academy. We will always need more pious *Orthodox Christian clergy*.

What we *don't* need are more licensed theologians.