

# THE LATIN CAPTIVITY IN UKRAINE

Or

"The shepherd's pipe of thy theology conquered the trumpets  
of the philosophers."

(Dismissal Hymn of St. Gregory the Theologian)

by

Metropolitan Ephraim of Boston

*We have written elsewhere about the "Latin Captivity", which still can be seen to a very great extent in the theological academies and seminaries of "World Orthodoxy." The Latin Scholastic approach to the study of our Orthodox Faith has had, and still has, a far greater influence on the graduates of these academies than many are willing to admit. At the same time, we have written that holy men of God constantly admonish us to read the Lives of the Saints. Again and again, they tell us that whoever does not read the Lives of the Saints at the beginning of his formation as an Orthodox Christian, will make no progress in the spiritual life. As we have pointed out elsewhere, the Lives of the Saints are the elementary school of a Christian education. If you have not carefully read them from cover to cover and learned them well, you have not yet finished even your elementary schooling in matters concerning the Faith.*

*The following account from the Life of St. Paisius Velichkovsky tell us in very graphic terms how thorough the Latin scholastic influence was in Ukrainian seminaries in the eighteenth century. It also describes the spiritual pitfalls and catastrophic results of this academic approach, so alien to our Orthodox Christian piety.*

*Certainly, there is a need for serious, scholarly theological studies, but the account below is a good example of how these studies can, and do, go awry.*

*In other words, there is education, and then there is mis-education.*

*The book from which this account is taken, The Life of Paisiy Velychovskyj, translated by J. M. E. Featherstone, and published by Harvard*

*University Press in 1989, is excellent, and should be in every Orthodox Christian home.*

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Whilst I was thus occupied during that winter it happened at the end of January that a small trial befell me. One of the students in the school from my city saw that I was neglecting my studies and, feeling sorry for me, went to the then director of the schools, His Reverence Sylvestre Kuljabka, who subsequently became the archimandrite of the Brotherhood Monastery of the Epiphany and the monastery's school, and later the bishop of St. Petersburg, and told him about me in detail. "He does not want to study," he said, "and his mother is paying the expenses for his studies in vain." Having heard this, he sent two students from the school to bring me before him.

When I arrived, he began to question me brusquely saying, "Why have you given up your studies in school?" Being by nature quite reticent, and even more so than usual when in the presence of such persons, I do not know how I made bold to answer him, saying, "My first reason for leaving my secular studies is my unswerving intention to become a monk; fearing the unknown hour of death, I desire, if only I could, to go off as soon as possible to such a place where, God helping, I should be able to fulfill my intention. A second reason is that I feel no benefit to my soul from secular studies: for hearing in these studies the oft-mentioned names of the gods and goddesses of the Greeks and the tales of their poets, I have come to hate such studies from the very bottom of my soul. If teachers used the God-inspired words of the holy Church in their secular teaching, receiving spiritual wisdom from the Holy Spirit, they would then be deemed worthy of the double benefit of spiritual wisdom and secular learning. Since, however, students today learn reasoning not from the Holy Spirit, as printed in the *Spiritual Alphabet*, but from Aristotle, Cicero, Plato, and the other pagan philosophers, for this reason they are utterly blinded by falsehood, and they have strayed from the true path in their understanding. They learn only locution: within their souls there is darkness and gloom, though upon their tongues there be all manner of wisdom. Thus, in accordance with this testimony, feeling no benefit in my soul from such learning and, moreover, fearing lest as a result of it I should somehow fall into dissolute reasoning, as befalls many, I have abandoned it. A third reason is that I have considered the fruits of this learning upon the spiritual leaders of monastic rank: how they live in great honor and glory and in all manner of bodily ease like secular dignitaries, dressing themselves in costly garments and riding in

state in splendid carriages drawn by choice horses. To this I say, heaven forbid! — not in condemnation, but with fear and trembling lest, if I remained long enough in the schools and, having acquired secular learning, then became a monk, I too should suffer not only this, but, because of the weakness of my soul, something ten thousand times worse, succumbing to all manner of spiritual and bodily passions. These, then, are the reasons why I have abandoned my secular studies."

The director, as the wisest of men, expressed a great many words in answer to what I had said, correcting my ignorance and explaining how great the benefit of secular learning was. "And if," he said to me, "you have not hitherto felt its benefit in your soul, as you say, there is nothing strange in this, for you have not yet reached the advanced studies. But when in time you come to these and attain real mastery of them, you will rejoice in their great profit and will praise God for delivering you from such ignorance as that in which you now abide."

Expressing these and many other similar words to me, urging me in every way to persist in my studies in school, he saw at last that I was not in the least affected by his admonitions, but abided in my obstinacy; and he was greatly vexed and would have punished me for this with a cruel beating. But I considered my extreme and constant bodily weakness, and fearing lest by the beating I should somehow lose the little health I had, I unwillingly complied with his wish, reckoning that this constraint would be exercised upon me for but a short time; for if I endured, with God's pleasure, until the summer, I would be completely free to act upon my intentions without any hindrance. I continued my studies in school, then, but only for the sake of form, making no progress in them whatsoever (pp. 18-19).

*The "advanced studies" to which the school director alluded consisted of Latin scholastic theology, pure and unadulterated. This was the Latin Captivity, whose echoes still reverberate in the classrooms of "Orthodox" seminaries. In these seminaries, for example, the students are taught to disdain the Lives of the Saints. Yes, there is a need to make sure, as far as possible, that the Lives are authentic. But the argument that the Lives are "too miraculous" does not pass muster with Orthodox Christians, because the same argument can, and is, used by rationalists against the Holy Scriptures. "The Lives have been interpolated," say others. Here again, great care and discretion must be exercised. This is a task that probably should not be entrusted to "licensed theologians," because they are the cause of most of the problems in the Church.*

*I would feel more comfortable with having people like St. Paisius Velichkovsky, St. Maximus the Hut-burner (more on him in a subsequent article), St. Parthenios of Chios, St. John the Romanian and St. Nicholas Zagorovsky on the committee that checks out the Lives of the Saints.*

*In the seminaries, the students are also taught that the hymnography of the Church is characterized by "poetic-license" — thereby conveniently ignoring the fact that the hymns were composed mostly by the Saints and Fathers of the Church, who were quite well known for their precision in articulating the articles of our Faith.*

*These flaws, and others, in the seminary system are what prompted Father George Florovsky to refer to this educational method as the "pseudo-morphosis" in the Church today. "Pseudo-morphosis" means "false education," or "false formation."*

*A Quotation from the book, Papa-Nicholas Planas, pretty much sizes it up:*

*They are trying nowadays, with the sorry state of the Church, to find out the cause, and they say that priests must receive "scholarly," "scientific" theological training. However, only if they are zealous for piety, then will the evil be corrected. Let your metropolitans come from the sacred monasteries, like Saint Niphon, patriarch of Constantinople, like Saint Theonas, archbishop of Thessalonica, and many others, who came from the Holy Mountain. How will the Church be benefited when they study in Geneva [or in Rome]? They will only come back with Protestant [or Papal] roots. They say that our Church is a century behind the times. Would that it had the piety of a century ago! The slavery of four hundred years reckoned 35,000 new martyrs — most of them illiterate. A liberal and scientific education is an excellent thing when it is accompanied by piety. Even so, Father Nicholas Planas knew very few letters, but because of his sincere piety, he possessed all the Beatitudes.*

To which we say, "Amen!"