

"ZEAL SHALL LAY HOLD UPON AN UNINSTRUCTED PEOPLE"

by

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In a previous article, "A Hope Fulfilled", I wrote that a truly Orthodox Christian academy might be a hard pill for some Orthodox to swallow. Essentially, this is because the "Orthodoxy" that these people have been taught is a far cry from the Orthodox Christianity of the Saints. So, when they are presented with the real McCoy, these people balk and protest, "That's not real Orthodoxy!"

But they are wrong.

An example: About two or three years ago, we were visited by three old calendar bishops from Greece, who belong to one of the thirteen traditionalist jurisdictions there. The subject of frequent reception of Holy Communion came up, and these bishops were curious about our rationale for encouraging our faithful to receive Holy Communion frequently (of course, with the proper spiritual preparation). They found this practice very odd. I told the bishops that the reasons for this practice were recorded in their own current Pocket Calendar!

Caught off guard by my response, they asked what I was talking about. I pointed out to them that, in their Pocket Calendar for that year, they mentioned the Life and Works of Saint Nicodemus of the Holy Mountain. Included in the list of the works by the Saint was the book entitled, "Concerning the *Continuous* Reception of Holy Communion"!!

Now, one could ask these bishops: "What's the point of listing the writings of the Saints if we don't bother to read them?" Is it just window dressing? But what is worse, these people find fault with those Orthodox Christians who are trying to follow the very teachings of the Saints!

That is why Orthodox Christianity is a hard pill to swallow for some people ^¾ including even some "traditionalist" Orthodox.

Another sad example:

Some twenty-five years ago or so, when Father Haralampos, a priestmonk of our monastery, was still young and healthy enough to travel to Greece, he made the acquaintance of an Athenian named Manuel, who was born on the island of Samos. Manuel was an expert goldsmith, in fact,

and he belonged to the Matthewite jurisdiction. He was also a very good chanter with a fine voice.

Manuel had his shop in downtown Athens, and Father Haralampos would visit him from time to time, so Manuel was always asking Father about good books to read on the Orthodox faith. So, one day, while Father Haralampos was rummaging through the shelves at one bookstore in Athens, he came upon a real gem. It was a book by Saint John of Damascus, *The Exposition of the Orthodox Faith*. On one page was the ancient text, and on the facing page was a Modern Greek translation. What a find! If there was ever an authoritative book on the Orthodox Christian faith, this was it!

With joy, Father Haralampos snatched up the book, paid for it, and hurried over to Manuel's shop to present this treasure to his friend. When he arrived, he triumphantly announced to Manuel that he had found just the book that Manuel was seeking.

Manuel thanked Father Haralampos profusely for this wonderful gift, and began eagerly to thumb through the index. He ran his finger down the list of subjects, and as he did so, Father Haralampos noticed that the expression on Manuel's face began to darken ever so slightly.

"This is just the book you want, Manuel," said Father Haralampos, with a reassuring voice.

"Yes," replied Manuel, but it was not an enthusiastic "yes." It was an "I'm not so sure" yes. "Yes, it's not bad, I suppose," hedged Manuel.

"Not bad?" cried Father Haralampos. "This is the best there is!"

"Well, I don't know," replied Manuel somewhat doubtfully. "I don't see anything in the index about the calendar issue."

Father Haralampos was thunderstruck.

There was nothing in this book about the calendar issue.... (which became an issue only over one thousand years *after* the book had been written)!!!

Obviously, in Manuel's "genuine" Orthodox eyes, what value could such a book have? And who was this Saint John of Damascus anyway, and why had he not mentioned the calendar issue in his book? What kind of a saint was he? Was he some sort of crypto-new calendarist? Did Manuel's priest or bishop acknowledge this saint?

The irony is: Manuel considered himself a zealous and "genuine Orthodox Christian."

He had been taught a good deal *against* the "other side," that is, the other old calendar factions, but had he been taught anything about *Orthodox Christianity*? Obviously not.

Truly, in a bad sense, "zeal shall lay hold upon an uninstructed people" (Esaias 26:11).

The really sad end of this story is that Manuel ultimately abandoned the old calendar movement in Greece and went back to the ecumenistic State Church.

Is that surprising? All he had learned before was animosity toward other traditional Orthodox Christians. Hatred for others will not sustain one for long, especially when it is coupled with an ignorance of what the Saints have taught us.

This is yet another reason why we are so desperately in need of the Academy of Saint Symeon the New Theologian, and of clergy who are schooled in Orthodox Christian sources.