

## Orthodoxy for the Whites?

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At the end of Bright Week, a firestorm hit Facebook Orthodox pages. It has become known that a young white supremacist by the name of Matthew Heimbach has been received into the Orthodox Church on Lazarus Sunday in the parish of the Antiochian Archdiocese in Bloomington, IN. Mr. Heimbach has wasted no time utilizing his new religious association. On Bright Monday he and a fellow member of the white supremacist group called Traditionalist Youth Network used an eight-bar wooden Orthodox cross to beat up a protester at a hate counter-rally organized by TradYouth on a campus of Indiana University. Photos of this episode with celebratory write-ups were posted on TradYouth blog and their Facebook page.<sup>1</sup>

Matthew Heimbach, as it turns out, is well-known in the circles both sympathetic to white supremacist cause and opposed to it. In January, he was profiled by Nightline as “a rising star on the white nationalist scene” and “the next David Duke, with Duke’s blessing”. He is an activist with considerable flair for fame and public exposure. As more details of his reception into Orthodoxy had come to light, it became apparent that his activities had been made known to the priest prior to his reception, and moreover, that other members of his movement also identify themselves as Orthodox.

The issue of how to deal with this case from the perspective of church discipline remains with the local Antiochian bishop who is aware of the situation. However, it presents a wider challenge to the American Orthodoxy. It is no secret that we have long attracted a population which confesses bigotry and xenophobia, and that our very jurisdictional setup supports ethnic and even racial division.

In his young life Matthew Heimbach has moved from one church to another, seeking a spiritual home for his racist ideology. His prior affiliation was with the infamous Society of St. Pius X, a schismatic Roman Catholic sect known for its extreme bigotry and anti-semitism. He has finally found his spiritual home in the Orthodox Church. In one interview, he lists as his inspirations the leader of Romanian ultra-nationalist organization “Legion of St. Michael the Archangel” Corneliu Codreanu, and St. John Chrysostom (the latter for his homilies “Against the Jews”).<sup>2</sup> His Facebook page and the TradYouth page have multiple posts dedicated to the Russian “Black Hundred” (a general term describing several ultra-nationalist monarchist Orthodox organizations in early 20<sup>th</sup> c. Russia), and to St. John of Kronstadt, a popular Russian saint who unfortunately provided considerable spiritual support to this movement. He asserts that the fascist political principles are completely in accordance with Orthodoxy as far as they outline the social structures. He also uses the ethnic structure of the Orthodox Church as proof of the legitimacy of racial segregation that he preaches:

“As an Orthodox Christian I believe in the separation of races into ethnically based Church’s. That is why even in Orthodoxy there is for instance a Greek, Russian, Romanian, Serbian, etc. Orthodox Church. Regional and racial identity is a fundamental principle of Christianity, must to the dismay of Leftists. I believe black Christians should be in their black Church’s, with black priests, having black kids, going to black Christian schools, etc.”<sup>3</sup>

Can we say in all honesty that all this is but a caricature? Nationalism dressed up in Orthodox garb is on the rise in the Orthodox countries in the Old World. “Golden Dawn” in Greece and ultra-nationalist movements in Russia not only position themselves as fundamentally Orthodox

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.tradyouth.org/2014/04/tradyouth-on-a-mission-fighting-for-faith-folk-and-family/>

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.john-friend.net/2014/03/q-w-traditionalist-youth-network.html> and a lengthy video interview on TYN website.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.occidentaldissent.com/2013/07/13/matthew-heimbach-at-american-freedom-conference/> (in Comments)

but enjoy considerable support of local and even foreign Orthodox clergy and hierarchy. Orthodox Church has never had its *Nostra Aetate*. Our hymnody is replete with anti-Jewish sentiment, and our inter-jurisdictional relations are plagued by ethnic strife. Just recently the Episcopal Assembly in America was shaken by the *démarche* of the ROCOR representatives demanding that the ethnic jurisdictional status quo be inviolate. Our official stance on contemporary social issues is firmly aligned with right-wing politics. We have no involvement in human rights movement aside from a still-controversial stand taken by the Greek Abp. Iakovos alongside Martin Luther King in 1964. Is it so surprising that we present a welcoming appearance to the likes of Matthew Heimbach and his comrades? According to the researches from Southern Poverty Law Center who monitor white supremacist group communications, the appeal of the Orthodox Church has been spreading in those circles for a while now, and certainly not for the good reasons. Even a cursory look at the Orthodox online discussions demonstrates, for instance, a wide-spread support for the Russian President Putin as a “righteous defender of Orthodoxy” against “degenerate liberal Western values” – the exact rhetoric of the Traditionalist Youth bloggers and their enthusiastic commentators.

In a paradoxical way it can be said that by asserting that Orthodoxy supports his racist, anti-semitic, xenophobic politics, Mr. Heimbach has accused the Orthodox. It seems to me that it is upon the American Orthodox to stand condemned or to rise to the challenge. The public exposure of this case presents Orthodox bishops in America, regardless of the jurisdiction, with an opportunity to begin honest soul-searching of how we manage to appear as a natural haven for people who stand against the message of the Gospel in their very core. For these are people who call Christ as their witness: “But we as so-called “right-wingers” could not be right-wing without the existence of Jesus Christ, for it is Jesus Christ that makes us Right Wing. His message of a top-down authority system originating from God’s Sovereignty over mankind and having it manifested into a divinely ordained order of natural hierarchy, contracts and covenants, universal and natural law that all must obey is the corner stone of what defined our ideological ancestors when they sat on the right side of the General Assembly in revolutionary France.”<sup>4</sup>

Or we can do nothing and sweep this under the ever-bulging rug, as has long been our custom. What will it be?..

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.tradyouth.org/2014/04/pascha-and-nationalism/#more-10472>