

A Leap into the Unknown

James Couchell (Bishop Demetrios)

Former Executive Secretary of the Orthodox Campus Commission

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To begin to imagine what you think and feel, what you expect as you prepare to enter college or return for another year of studies, I must search back into my thoughts some ten years. It was then that I left the nice comfortable security of family life in a small town of South Carolina. I became a freshman in a university in Chicago with a student population almost equal to that of the city I left. I remember my doubts, my fears. What the outcome of this grave decision to go to college would be was still uncertain. Nonetheless, the step was taken—actually, leap—a leap into the unknown.

I can still picture myself clearly walking up and down the shores of Lake Michigan wondering, “What in the world am I doing here? Where in the world am I heading? Where in the world would I like to get?” At that time my plans were to learn a profession, get out in four years, and start making money.

Education then is a risk; you never know what’s going to happen. I congratulate you for taking that risk. In my estimation you have decided to take the most exciting and important leap into the unknown that you will ever take. You are entering the world of new ideas, new philosophies, new ways of life. What will happen to the old ways, the old ideas, when mom can no longer remind you to go for a haircut or to Church?

Your Church is concerned about what will happen during these formative years. The Orthodox Campus Commission is an expression of the concern of your Hierarchs for what will happen to you. We are concerned because we know that many think religion is nothing but a bunch of do’s and don’ts—with the don’ts seeming to be a lot more appealing, a lot more exciting than the do’s. You will be tempted by talk of new moralities, of situational ethics. Archbishop Iakovos once said that immorality no longer exists because immorality presupposes a morality. And that which characterizes our society is amorality—no morals at all. Beware, then, of so-called “new moralities.” Be prepared to hear from learned professors whom you will admire that they are atheists.

I could probably come up with a list of at least 10 BEWARES for college students and some of you might question, well if there is so much wrong maybe I shouldn’t go to college. No, that’s not what I mean to get across. St Paul says, “try all and keep what is good.” You will hear much and learn much in college. Keep what is good.

As you listen and learn and become proficient in your chosen area of study, devote some time also to learning about your Orthodox faith. Religion, you know, is not just an area of study, it is a way of life. It is to be lived whether you become a doctor, a lawyer, a teacher or a ditch digger. To live it, you must know about it. Faith and knowledge go hand in hand. As you learn more our Orthodox Church on a level equal to your college studies your faith will increase and you will come to understand that the way shown to us by God is far superior to the philosophies of men. In your studies you will

give Plato and Rousseau and Shakespeare and James Joyce a change. Give Christ a chance too.

Mother Maria, an Orthodox nun who died in the gas chambers with the Jews during World War II, said that “If Christianity is not fire, it is nothing.” All of you have proved your willingness to take a risk, by entering college. I invite you to take another—Jump into the fire—learn what it’s all about.

For some a little knowledge leads them to proclaim themselves God. Well the truth is that according to Orthodox theology we are called to be gods. However, not after the example of the false prophets, the self-proclaimers, but in imitation of Him who gave his life for us. Christ’s challenge to us is to strive for perfection. It was not an empty challenge because he provided the example for us to follow. “Behold The Man,” St. John exhorts us. In him there is perfection, purity.

Don’t set your sights lower. Don’t adopt as your way of life one proposed by men. Rather remain steadfast in that way shown to us by the Creator of men. During your years in college attend Church regularly, receive spiritual nourishment frequently. Just as the body needs food, so does the spirit. Don’t fall prey to the destructive campus attitude that treats the Church like a disease—something to avoid.

Assert your Orthodox faith, learn more about it, live it. If there are enough Orthodox students at the college you attend start an Orthodox Campus Fellowship with a program that will assist you to do just that. Our Hierarchs feel that Orthodoxy in America is in dire need of an Orthodox intelligentsia. For that reason, the Campus Commission was created to begin making available some resource material that will make Orthodoxy meaningful to college students.

This modern world, my fellow young people, is now our job. If we don’t like its direction, we must change it. If we don’t like war, poverty, disease, injustice, corruption, prejudice, the hypocrisy of older generations—then we must do something about it. May I be so bold as to suggest that what You, I, all of us should do about it is begin to live our Orthodox faith. A simple answer—not a simple way, not the way the world is today. Take charge of the world,--change its direction.