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**The Lonely Path of Integrity
Spyridon, Archbishop of America (1996-1999)**

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Alone and Uncompromising

by Justine Frangouli

Spyridon's resignation from America's Archiepiscopal see in the summer of 1999 brought to a close a dramatic phase in the history of the Church and the Greek American community. Both Church and community were blatantly exploited to serve the narrow purposes of the Phanar.

In this tumultuous three-year period, the institutions were subjugated to the interests of a small, but influential group within the Archdiocese of America. In reality, its actions served to mask the Phanar's thirst for absolute control over the Throne's largest and wealthiest eparchy.

The methods used to topple Iakovos were employed against Spyridon, with Iakovos this time serving as an additional weapon. Avenging his removal from the Throne, Iakovos derived some satisfaction by plotting against the man his nemesis Bartholomew had chosen as the new Archbishop of America.

The protagonists in the repeat performance were the "friends of the Patriarch." When they saw that Spyridon would not do their bidding, they once again resorted to systematic and remorseless attacks. Every tactic was employed to undermine the Archbishop; every ethical code was violated. Today, comfortably ensconced in their administrative posts after their restoration to power, they hold the reins of the Archdiocese, offering their good services to the Phanar.

The pawns in this cruel game were the Metropolitan. In their blind desire to augment their own powers, they were driven to fabricate rebellion and discord. Following Spyridon's downfall, they ended up stagnant in their dioceses, unable to usurp the authority of the Archiepiscopal Throne.

Accessories in this venture were the priests and the small-time players of America's Church, recruited to bring about a chain of factitious crises to depict the Greek American community as torn by division. They were content with their small rewards: words of praise and the illusory satisfaction that they were powerful enough to oust an Archbishop.

The fomenters of the simulated crisis and the organizers of extra-ecclesiastical structures were the "offended" faction at Holy Cross School of Theology, who feared that their control over theological education was threatened. Immediately reinstated after Spyridon's resignation, they have not, as yet, fully recovered.

Also mobilized in the war against the Archbishop were the advocates of autocephaly and America's "anti-Patriarchal" circles, hoping for complete independence from the Phanar. The proposed draft of the Archdiocese's new Charter, anticipating a semi-autonomous status similar to that of Crete, is the first step towards this objective.

In the struggle's final stage, a number of Greek government players came on board. Apparently, they realized the World Council of Hellenes Abroad (SAE) was losing ground in America to a new spiritual leader who, based on his vested rights, was building the future of the Greek American community.

Throughout the stormy period, the Greek American newspaper The National Herald offered its loud support for every simulated crisis. As contrived leaks poured onto the presses from the backrooms of power, the paper's scare headlines strengthened the anti-Spyridon war of attrition, just as they had against Iakovos. Today resting on its laurels, The National Herald criticizes the Phanar and propagandizes for the autocephalous movement in the Church of America.

The upshot of this stormy three-year tenure was the election of Demetrios. Giving up many of his powers, he has granted the backrooms of power carte blanche in administering the Archdiocese, fully complying with the Mother Church's commands even though he is merely her adoptive son.

This unbelievable setting of intrigue, where power games, political expediencies, personal ambitions, financial interests, and vindictive acts were intermingled, irreparably damaged the Greek Orthodox Church's prestige and signaled her irrevocable decline.

The Patriarchate was exposed beyond repair. The facts clearly revealed that it had unscrupulously conducted trench warfare to force, by whatever means, the resignation of an Archbishop it had unanimously elected three years earlier.

The Greek American community was exploited at the risk of being divided. With great distress, it witnessed the collapse of its institutions for the benefit of organized interests.

The Church of America's unity was irreversibly shaken by the Bishops' elevation to Metropolitans and the reinforcement of their craving for power.

Discussion of vital Diaspora issues was deferred to a "more adequate time." The changing of the guard at the Archdiocese halted the entire promotion of Hellenic national issues and Greek education in the United States.

Finally, Spyridon was vilified, both as an Archbishop and a man, by unrelenting mud slinging over the entire course of his tenure. His enemies, in an effort to oust him from office, denied all his virtues: his love of work, his effectiveness, his multifaceted education, and his vision for the future of Orthodoxy and Hellenism in America.

When with remarkable dignity, he withdrew from the scene in August 1999, he forever left behind an Archdiocese whose long decline he had attempted to reverse...

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