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

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Where is the Crisis Lurking?

by Justine Frangouli

Landscape in mist

When two years ago, for reasons known to all, Archbishop Iakovos of America was humiliatingly forced to resign from the Archiepiscopal throne of America, the entire Greek American community knew that it would be difficult for any successor to fill the gap left by a church man whose stature had grown over the decades and had matured with an extensive 38-year pastoral experience. Iakovos who had gone through various stages of experimentation in the Church of America and had even seen his own political identity called into question, withdrew from active ministry embittered yet with his head held high. Be it as it may, Iakovos is considered today not only by ordinary people, but also by Greek political figures, as a charismatic leader, worthy of having been at the helm of a Greek American community known for the multitude of its peculiarities.

Thus, it was the Phanar's favorite, Spyridon, that succeeded Iakovos on the Archiepiscopal throne of America. Here was a man of a many-sided culture, guaranteed to be able to rise to the challenge of his position by his education and American origins. In addition, Spyridon brought with him a long experience in inter-church dialogue, an experience that the Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople greatly counted on, since this was at the top of the agenda of his own Patriarchal task.

Against all odds, the current Archbishop of America has for two years constantly been driven off course, by his own decisions and acts, as some maintain, but also by the rabid hostility the establishment nourishes towards him, as is proved by the facts.

The crisis

The crisis in the Archdiocese has, in fact, been lurking in the background for a year and a half, ever since the current Archbishop decided to overturn the establishment by placing his own people in key decision-making positions. The step taken by the Archbishop culminated in the selection of a new Archdiocesan Council. He himself admitted, in a recent interview, that this situation is the product of a "relief of guard" at the Archdiocese of America. "The old guard is going, the new one's coming," he told the Ethnos newspaper.

The tips of the iceberg, as can be seen from recent events, are:

GOAL (Greek Orthodox American Leaders), a church pressure group organization set up recently. It consists chiefly of second-generation Greek Americans who openly oppose any decisions taken by the Archbishop. This is an elitist group --it certainly does not represent the broad masses-- which managed to steal the show at the Clergy-Laity Congress in Orlando last summer, by succeeding in having a motion passed on the reinstatement of the priests-professors of Holy Cross School of Theology --an issue not on the agenda.

OCL (Orthodox Christian Laity), an organization set up some ten years ago and numbering about 1,000 members. In a recent resolution passed at a conference held in Los Angeles on October 10 this year, OCL set autocephaly as the new goal of the Church of America. It based its resolution on the belief that Church of America is no longer a "Diaspora," but a

mature entity with a long history; a Church which, endowed with the necessary infrastructure, fulfills the conditions for autocephaly.

The two letters by the five Metropolitans, members of the Archdiocese's Eparchial Synod (Anthony of the Dardanelles/San Francisco, Maximos of Ainos/Pittsburgh, Isaiah of Proikonisos/Denver, Methodios of Anea/Boston, Iakovos of Krini/Chicago). The letters show convincingly the Metropolitans' aim to increase their powers, though apparently they were motivated by the Metropolitans' disagreement with the Archdiocese's lawsuit against GOAL (over the return of the mailing list believed to have been stolen by the organization).

In reality, the five Metropolitans are using the Archbishop's dispute with GOAL as a pretext to add their own fuel to the fire by accusing Spyridon of abolishing the Synod and entrusting the administration of the Church to nine laymen, those of the Archdiocesan Council's Executive Committee.

"The Charter is clear," the Metropolitans maintain, "as to who has the supreme administrative responsibility" in the Church. Hence, they demand that the Archbishop should satisfy their request to be co-administrators of the Archdiocese.

To sum up...

Thus, the crisis that is now breaking out in serial form within the Archdiocese of America is trumped-up and congruent with the two Greek American lay groups, GOAL and OCL, according to estimations from various circles in the Greek American community. At this stage, the Metropolitans have identified with the aforementioned groups; they are intensifying the crisis to lay claim to privileges for themselves and, knowingly or unknowingly, are promoting the cause of Americanizing the Greek Orthodox Church of America.

In this way, should Patriarch Bartholomew of Constantinople reach the decision to remove Archbishop Spyridon, he would concurrently be endorsing the demands of OCL and GOAL, which sooner or later will lead to the de-Hellenization of the Greek Orthodox Church in America. If the objective is to make the Church of America autocephalous, then her current Archbishop is to be sacrificed on this altar.

However, the moment that, under the pressure of successive crises and dilemmas, the Ecumenical Patriarch should remove Archbishop Spyridon, he will be accepting irresponsibility in the choice of Spyridon as Archbishop of America. At the same time, he will have to pay a high "political" price for the de-Hellenization of the Church of America and the further decline of Hellenism in this country. And not only the Patriarch, but also the entire Greek American community, will be called to pay this price.

Finally, such a step would mean the end of the Patriarchate's control over the Archdiocese's backyard. For who can guarantee that the next Archbishop will meet GOAL's, OCL's and the five Metropolitans' requirements?

[Translated from Greek]

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