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

by Justine Frangouli -Argyris

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Archdiocese of America

The Archdiocese of America before a New Adventure

by Justine Frangouli

While relations between Archbishop Spyridon of America and the five Metropolitans seem on the way towards being restored after the Eparchial Synod's session two days ago (in spite of the fact that differences still persist and that Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew has come on the scene in the now decisive role of arbitrator), a new batch of publications speaking of a crisis in the Archdiocese has been added to the equation –just one week before Archbishop Spyridon's official visit to Athens, planned for 9-15 February.

The bone of contention has been the decision of the Archbishop, a little after his return from Constantinople, to redefine the duties of the NY Cathedral's Dean, Fr Robert Stephanopoulos, father of the well-known Greek American political figure George Stephanopoulos. The Dean has been relieved of his administrative duties at the Cathedral, where he had served for 18 years. The Cathedral is now headed by the Archiepiscopal vicar, Archimandrite Gabriel Karambis.

At a meeting with the Archbishop, Fr Stephanopoulos who retains the title of Dean at the Cathedral was assigned the responsibility of coordinating all priests ministering to various institutions in Manhattan, a project of Fr Stephanopoulos put before Iakovos, former Archbishop of America, and rejected at that time.

Circles close to Fr Stephanopoulos regard the reassignment as a downgrading of his role owing to the fact that he was among the priests who had signed a letter opposing the Archbishop and, furthermore, happens to be closely tied to GOAL, a church pressure group.

Asked about the matter by Ethnos, the Archbishop said: "Fr Stephanopoulos has in reality been promoted, and while he retains the title of Dean of our Cathedral, now has direct responsibility for implementing an ambitious charitable and social project for our Cathedral."

At yet another meeting with the Archbishop, Fr Stephanopoulos himself expressed his satisfaction "at the renewal of trust in his person and gave assurances that he was undertaking his new ministry with zeal and enthusiasm."

Asked if this action could give rise to a crisis within the Archdiocese, the Primate of the Church replied: "It would seem that the advancement of the Church's mission is a problem in certain circles which persist in seeing crises everywhere. The Church has to proceed with completing her task regardless of the ambitions and objectives of single individuals or groups of faithful."

In spite of the fact that some regard the new assignment as a downgrading, Fr Stephanopoulos himself does not agree with that wording: "The new project which I am undertaking, that is, the co-ordination of all ministries in Manhattan is a great endeavor and an ambitious scheme which I had thought out in the past and submitted to the former Archbishop of America some five years ago. As a task I welcome it and accept it; it's something I want to do. The problem which has arisen is that the Archiepiscopal vicar, Fr Karambis, was put in charge first, and it was a day later that I was entrusted with my new duties."

Asked by Ethnos if he saw his new posting as a retaliatory initiative for his previous stance towards the Archbishop, the Dean of the Cathedral replied that he had no conversation with the Archbishop on the matter and that, in the last analysis, he is the Archbishop and the judge of where he will place his clergy.

However, in spite of the fact that both sides interpret the new assignment as an act of entrusting the well-known priest with a new model role of ministry on behalf of the Cathedral in Manhattan, the action taken by Archbishop Spyridon is being closely scrutinized by his critics. What price will he have to pay for such decision? Only the future will tell.

[Translated from Greek]

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