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

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Ethnos (Athens Daily) - July 13, 1999

Before the End

by Justine Frangouli

Although the final act in Archbishop Spyridon's drama has not yet been played out in the Phanars's dark corridors, it seems that the suspense story of recent days will soon, yet not immediately, reach a conclusion.

Two and a half years ago Spyridon had been put by the Phanar at the helm of the Church in America in spite of the Greek government's objections. With his degree from the Theological School of Halki, with his years of postgraduate study at various European universities, with his long experience in inter-church dialogue and his 20 years of ministry in Italy, he had come to New York under the heavy cloud of his predecessor Iakovos' dismissal, a man who had successfully ministered to the Archdiocese of America for 38 years.

No one in America ever forgave Patriarch Bartholomew for the pitiless way in which Iakovos was treated. There were, therefore, many reservations about the new Archbishop who had agreed to the fragmentation of the Archdiocese of North and South America into four parts, thus serving the designs of the Phanar to weaken the role of this great eparchy.

Comparisons between the two church leaders, the entourage of Iakovos, and the clerical-episcopal establishment of America soon began to tighten a noose around the new Archbishop, who, by reason of character (he is regarded as authoritarian and absolute), had undertaken certain radical initiatives from the very beginning of his ministry.

The first reactions came with Spyridon's decision in 1997 to transfer two professors of Hellenic College-Holy Cross School of Theology (Boston), who had brought to light a "sexual harassment" scandal among the seminarians. The essence of the conflict with the School's establishment lay, however, in the new Archbishop's efforts to bring about a return to traditional Orthodox worship in a Church which, as many maintain, has taken the highroad to Protestantism. The next action he took to ensure a strict observance of Byzantine Orthodox traditions provoked reaction from certain priests who began to accuse him of fundamentalism.

The gradual removal of Iakovos's associates from Archdiocese administrative posts brought Spyridon into open conflict with the "big dollars". The replacement of multimillionaires Michael Jaharis and Alex Spanos on the Archdiocesan Council cost Spyridon quite a few headaches. He brought new blood into the Archdiocese by appointing businessmen more approachable and closer to the people. His attempt to get rid of the influential Fr Alex Karloutsos, the link between the Patriarchate and big Greek American financial circles, proved fatal.

Dissident reactions culminated in the establishment of GOAL (Greek Orthodox American Leaders), a church pressure group that attacked the Archbishop and his ministry from all sides. Furthermore, OCL, a lay organization that for years had been campaigning for autocephaly, began intensifying its activities.

Last summer, Patriarch Bartholomew summoned Spyridon to the Phanar and did not refrain from rebuking him before his five Bishops. Following their elevation to Metropolitans, the Bishops had gradually become critical of the Archbishop's decisions and actions. In October, the five

Metropolitans, encouraged by the Patriarch, wrote two letters of protest against their Primate, seeking to further increase their own powers. At the same period, approximately 100 priests wrote a similar letter.

On January 12, the Patriarch again summoned the Archbishop and the five Metropolitans to the Phanar. This time, he appeared to confirm Spyridon's authority, as he called upon all forces concerned to find a way to work together with their Archbishop. From that point on, Archbishop Spyridon did some fence mending (with the exception perhaps of his move to redefine the ministry of Fr. Robert Stephanopoulos, father of the well-known political figure George Stephanopoulos).

He reactivated the Eparchial Synod, restored his relations with PASOK during his visit to Greece, attempted an approach to parishes that had come under the influence of the aforementioned dissident groups, and was particularly vigorous in advancing Greek National issues, the Cyprus one included. The fact that this crescendo again got him nowhere is to be explained by the influence Fr Alex Karloutsos has on the Patriarch and Spyridon's fatal involvement in the Cyprus issue.

However the story ends, the recent crisis has been a blow to the prestige of both the Patriarchate and the Church of America, as all are fully aware that any solution to the Archdiocese issue is only temporary and, at any moment, reversible.

[Translated from Greek]

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