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

by Justine Frangouli -Argyris

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The Chessboard Called the Church

by Justine Frangouli

Yet again the Patriarchate has left the Church of America –and together with the Church, the whole Greek American community– in a state of uncertainty and suspense. On Tuesday, without taking any decision of any sort, the Phanar again tabled the issue of whether Archbishop Spyridon should remain in office to some future date.

It seems that the refusal of the Primate of the Church of America to tend his resignation, and the difficulty of finding a successor, have led the Ecumenical Patriarch to move his pawns without haste on the chessboard of developments, leaving those involved –the press and the broad masses of Greek Americans– “with bated breath”.

The press release issued by the Patriarchate Holy Synod stated that the Archbishop of America, three US Metropolitans and Archdiocesan Council President John Catsimatidis, had met and worked together.

In the same document, the Patriarchate seemed to be extremely alarmed by revelations made by the press regarding the recent contrived crisis in the Archdiocese of America, attributed to the influence exerted on the Phanar by certain powerful financial figures in the Greek American community. The Patriarchate denied such press attributions: “The motives of Mother Church have always been selfless, inspired by purely ecclesiastical criteria, and her ministry has always been self-sacrificial. In taking decisions and action, the Mother Church aims only at serving the interests of her children, wherever they may be.”

Nevertheless, the official communiqué failed to deny stories printed in the Greek press. According to these reports, Archbishop Spyridon’s urgent summons to the Phanar is directly connected with his involvement in Greek National issues, in particular that of Cyprus. The failure is attributed by certain Greek American circles to the fact that the Patriarchate, called upon to take a stand, had no option but to abstain from referring to such a sensitive matter publicly.

At his meeting yesterday morning with the Patriarch and the Holy Synod, John Catsimatidis, a prominent Greek American figure and Archdiocesan Council President, presented his views on church affairs in America. He was assured that no hasty decision would be taken with regard to the future of the Archdiocese of America.

US Metropolitans Maximos of Ainos (Pittsburgh), Iakovos of Krene (Chicago) and Anthony of the Dardanelles (San Fransisco), at their meeting with the Patriarch and members of the Synod, once again presented their demand to have Archbishop Spyridon removed and argued that his successor should be chosen from among themselves. Considering Archbishop Spyridon’s removal as certain, they did not hesitate to approach various prominent Greek Americans to support their candidacy. Their request called to mind the Scriptural passage “They parted my garments among them, and for my clothing they cast lots,” ...even before there are any garments.

At the same time, circles close to the Archbishop pointed out that this month will see the expiry of the time given to Archbishop Spyridon to carry out the reforms Patriarch Bartholomew has for some time been waiting for: that the issue of Holy Cross School of Theology be brought to conclusion; that the associates of Fr George Passias, former Chancellor of the Archdiocese, be

removed; that the revision of the Archdiocese Charter be speeded up; and that at the same time the Synodical institution be given a more important role.

Archbishop Spyridon has, of course, time to act, even at the last moment, along the lines required. If, however, he gives way on all these points (and, no doubt, on certain others not yet apparent), he will be putting his signature to complete submission to the establishment, an establishment he refused to serve during the first three years of his tenure.

If, in fact, such course is followed, then the Phanar should not ever again raise the issue of the Archdiocese of America, but Archbishop Spyridon will be called upon to pay the price of backing down.

In any event, moves must be made quickly, because the damage caused to both the Patriarchate and the Archdiocese of America is becoming day by day more serious, leading to consequences no one can predict.

[Translated from Greek]

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