

www.spyridon.ws

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

by Justine Frangouli-Argyris

GreekNews - January 1, 2007

2006 Year in Review: The Ecclesiastical Affairs Worldwide

By H.E. Spyridon, former Archbishop of America

2006 was, for Greek Orthodoxy, a year rich in both ecclesiastical events and activity behind the scenes. However, it did not bring about any eminently important and historic developments. At the same time, several chronic issues of major significance were once again shunted, unsolved, to the new calendar year.

The major blaze of publicity was dominated by the visit of the Pope of Rome, Benedict XVI, to the headquarters of the Ecumenical Patriarchate at the Phanar within the context of a custom which dates from the time of the great Athenagoras and requests that Popes visit the primatial see of Orthodoxy. Thus, the newly elected Pope, following in the steps of Paul VI and John Paul II, honored the rendez-vous with the Orthodox leadership at the Patronal Feast of the Ecumenical Patriarchate on November 30.

The papal visit, however enthusiastically defined as "a turn of Roman Catholic leadership toward the Orthodox East," bears all the earmarks of a traditional customary event that unfolded according to strict ecclesiastical protocol. In the joint declaration issued at the end of the visit there is in fact no indication whatsoever of any new ecumenical course nor, more specially, of any new initiatives for future relations between Orthodoxy and Roman Catholicism.

On a publicity level, one may stress that, while the papal visit had been long scheduled as a customary participation of the Pope at the Ecumenical Patriarchate's Patronal Feast, the world media ended up turning it into a goodwill journey to Turkey in the ongoing effort by Benedict to placate Moslems still infuriated by his statements on Islam in Regensburg. The papal visit to the Patriarchate was thus downgraded on the screens of world television as one among many stops of the "Pope's visit to Turkey."

In the sensitive and key area of the Patriarchate of Jerusalem no changes took place. As a result, the situation there continues to remain a source of concern despite the fact that it no longer appears in the headlines of the Greek media.

It would have been naive to expect that the turbulent events which led to the change of patriarchal leadership in 2005 would not entail further complications. As such, we are now witnessing acts by other non-Orthodox Churches that clearly forebode a dynamic contestation of the Holy Sites status quo. At the same time, we learn that the Church of Russia has begun requesting of the Israeli authorities the right to penetrate the jurisdiction of the Jerusalem Patriarchate on the basis of offering her spiritual assistance to the hundreds of thousands of Russian Orthodox believers of Jewish origin established in Israel during the past fifteen years. Moreover, the Israeli authorities continue to recognize Eirinaios as Patriarch of Jerusalem thereby prolonging a dual leadership at the Patriarchate by delaying the recognition of Theophilos, elected as a result of the outrages of 2005.

A milestone in the recent history of the Church of Greece was the official visit of Archbishop Christodoulos of Athens and all Greece to the Vatican. The visit was carried out with the "aim of reaffirming the need for both Churches to join forces so that they can ensure that Europe maintain her Christian character and to deal with burning human issues needy of a solution the Church can offer." The head of the Church of Greece, known for her hitherto conservative stance toward Roman Catholicism, was warmly received and highly honored by the Vatican leadership.

Christodoulos' appearance in Rome, barely two weeks after Pope Benedict's visit to the Ecumenical Patriarchate, was enthusiastically greeted by the media which qualified it as "historic" and as the opening of a new chapter in the relations between the two Churches.

By the same token, Christodoulos tangibly improved the image of the Church of Greece, stained these past two years by attacks against his own person and his entourage. All the same, however, the archbishop's initiative incurred and continues to incur criticism from a group of hierarchs fostered, so it seems, by ecclesiastical circles outside Greece.

The Church of Cyprus, on the other hand, after the long illness and inactivity of Archbishop Chrysostom I, has a new leader in the person of Chrysostomos, hitherto Metropolitan of Paphos. Everything indicates that the new primate, blessed with sound ideas and a clear vision, will decisively contribute to the growth of the Church of Saint Barnabas and lead her toward a brighter future.

In the Pan-Orthodox field one must take note of the re-opening of the Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches through a meeting of their sixty-member Joint Commission in Belgrade. The meetings of the Commission had been interrupted at the beginning of the '90s mainly due to the revival of Uniatism and other expansionist initiatives undertaken by the Vatican in Eastern Europe.

In 2006 several major church issues remained stationary:

a) No improvement was made in Turkey's stand vis-a-vis the Ecumenical Patriarchate with the Turkish authorities continuing to exert pressure and restrictions on the Patriarchate and the local Greek Orthodox community. Meanwhile, campaigns led by various Greek Orthodox organizations aimed at adopting resolutions, promoting paid inserts in the press, and collecting signatures to further the cause of religious freedom in Turkey, are, as usual, unable to achieve any goals;

b) Another unsolved issue remains the re-opening of the Theological Faculty of Halki in spite of the Phanar's relentless efforts. The Turkish authorities, insisting that the re-opening of Halki would undermine the secular character of the Turkish State, seem unpersuadable and determined to ignore whatever consequences their refusal could have for their country's integration into the European Union;

c) Stagnation was also observed in the perennial issue concerning the composition of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's Synod with its members continuing to be divided equally between Turkish and foreign citizens;

d) No progress whatsoever was made in regard to the issue of returning the famous Esphigmenou Monastery back to canonical order, i.e. to a normal state of relations with the other nineteen monasteries on Mount Athos and the Ecumenical Patriarchate. The occupiers of the historic monastery continue their campaign of systematic disinformation and every so often provoke extremist scenes of religious intolerance and violence. The unsettled situation, persisting for some thirty years now, continues to hinder the institutional functioning of the Holy Mount's thousand-year established order and represents, according to Athonite monks, "a grave threat to Mount Athos itself."

2006 left the Orthodox Church sadly poorer with the passing of Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Ephesos, one of the most illustrious figures of contemporary Orthodoxy with a vast legacy in all important sectors of the Ecumenical Patriarchate's life during the last fifty years. Known for his brilliant activity as professor at the Theological Faculty of Halki, he represented the Mother Church innumerable times on the world ecclesiastical scene. Blessed with the gifts of erudition and versatility, frankness and integrity, he was the last representative of the great school of Phanariot hierarchs and the Phanar's old nobleness. The void he leaves behind is an irreplaceable one indeed.

This material comes from [spyridon.ws](http://www.spyridon.ws)
<http://www.spyridon.ws/>

The URL for this document is:
http://www.spyridon.ws/EN/spyr_today/spt_var8.html