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

by Justine Frangouli-Argyris

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**A Review of Church Events in 2007**

By H.E. Spyridon, former Archbishop of America

**Orthodox Church events in 2007 were marked by a particularly heavy atmosphere that reached its peak with the sudden illness of Archbishop Christodoulos, primate of the Church of Greece. The death of the former Archbishop of Cyprus, Chrysostomos II, which came to pass a few days before Christmas, concluded the year.**

The first issue to be considered is that concerning the Patriarchate of Jerusalem where the situation continues to be fluid. Theofilos III was finally recognized by the Israeli government as the new leader of the Church of Jerusalem in mid-December, a full two and a half years after his election as patriarch. He was at long last handed the official document of recognition by the Israeli Ministry of the Interior on Christmas Eve. According to journalistic sources, governmental approval was finally secured only after the new patriarch agreed to ratify the contracts signed during his predecessor's tenure regarding significant church properties in the Old City leased to Israeli companies.

Theophilos was elected in 2005 as successor to Eirineos who, for hitherto unknown reasons, was dethroned through unconventional summary proceedings following an atypically strong intervention by the Greek Government which was only to be subsequently emulated, in its turn, by the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

The issue of the new patriarch's definitive recognition by Jordan and the Palestinians seems to be still pending. Jordan, along with the Palestinian Authority, had requested the following from the new patriarch: i) the cancellation of the aforementioned contracts; ii) a larger role for the Arabic-speaking Orthodox in the Patriarchate's administration. Both had initially recognized Theophilos with the agreement that he would satisfy their requests. But, after these were not met over the course of two years, they withdrew their official recognition this past summer. However, following an intervention by the Greek Foreign Ministry, the patriarch was given a six month extension to comply.

It should be noted that the Jerusalem events of 2005 and the unorthodox ousting of Eirineos brought about fundamental changes in the Patriarchate's operations there. Until 2005, the recognition of the Patriarch of Jerusalem was a mere formality attended to by Jordan, whereas, now, Jordan, the Palestinian Authority and especially Israel have obtained a very strong say in the matter. Moreover, it seems that Israel has now asserted a right to interfere in the Patriarchate's everyday operations. Last but not least, these events led the Arabic-speaking faithful, strongly supported by Jordan and the Palestinian Authority, to claim a substantial participation in the administration of the Church of Zion.

In 2007, the Ecumenical Patriarchate was faced with an increase of religious freedom and human rights questions in Turkey. There was the destruction of a monastery on the island of Halki by the local forest inspection, attacks on churches and confiscation of Greek-Orthodox church properties. Repeated representations and appeals to the Turkish leadership by the Patriarchate, the World Council of Churches and other ecclesiastical bodies such as the Archons in America, as well as steps taken by the U.S. House Foreign Affairs Committee, proved completely ineffective. Indeed, for certain matters regarding church properties, the Patriarchate has resorted to the European Court of Human Rights in the hope of obtaining a fair outcome.

This year, once again, the Ecumenical Patriarchate found itself seriously confronted with the issue of its ecumenicity. Turkish authorities have always contested the Patriarchate's ecumenical role in one way or another but apparently they have now decided to enhance their anti-patriarchal position. Last June, the Turkish Supreme Court pronounced a judgment according to which the Patriarchate is in violation of the law when using its historical title "ecumenical." Responding to such a development, the Patriarchate convened a synaxis of the Hierarchy of the Ecumenical Throne to study the question and issue a document. The fact that hierarchs from abroad now participate in the Patriarchate's Synod is thus used as another argument in support of the Patriarchate's ecumenicity. However, this view seems wanting should one consider that the majority of votes in the Synod are always in the hands of its members from Turkey.

The new principle in Greek foreign diplomacy, according to which "the Ecumenical Patriarchate issue is not part of the Greek-Turkish dialogue but is rather a broader question that concerns Europe and the international community" has become a source of grave concern to the Phanar leadership. Implementing said principle in a recent meeting with his

Turkish counterpart in Ankara, Greece's Prime Minister --irrespective of Bartholomew's pleas-- did not bring up the issue of the Patriarchate in their discussions but, rather, charged his ministers to deal with the matter at a lower level. It seems the same method will be followed by Prime Minister Karamanlis during his upcoming visit to Turkey where he will first conclude talks with Turkish leaders in Ankara prior to visiting the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Such an approach signals a new course in Greek-Turkish relations.

The grave illness that suddenly stroke Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and primate of the Church of Greece, was a serious blow to Greek Orthodoxy. The Church of Greece was deprived of Christodoulos' dynamic leadership and his illness quickly gave ground to excessive, inopportune and improper conjecture and talk about his potential successor. Such haste and inappropriate behavior by hierarchs aggrieved great numbers of believers.

Archbishop Christodoulos' succession is likely to cause new friction between the Ecumenical Patriarchate and the majority of the Hierarchy in Greece. In spite of the Ecumenical Patriarch's declarations to reporters months ago, namely that the Phanar "has no jurisdiction to interfere in issues that concern solely the Church of Greece," the Greek Government was recently notified that the Patriarchate opposes the candidature of a specific hierarch, that of Metropolitan Eustathios of Sparta.

On Mount Athos, more and more monks joined to voice their disapproval of the Patriarchate's current leadership for making too many "concessions" to other religious denominations and, in particular, to the Roman Catholic Church. Through open letters, hundreds of monks from various Athonite monasteries and monastic dependencies asked for a new interruption of the Ecumenical Patriarch's commemoration on the Holy Mount. Meanwhile, the situation at the Esfigmenou monastery continues to be unsettled with its rebellious monastic community still in possession of the monastery's buildings and premises and persisting even more vehemently with its excessive claims.

The sad phenomena of pederasty and homosexuality among the clergy continued to taint the life of the Greek-Orthodox Archdiocese of America in 2007. In spite of initial efforts to understate the importance of such incidents, many articles and commentaries appeared in the Greek-American press, shocking believers and raising waves of deep indignation. The incidents are judged exceptionally worrisome as the press in Greece every so often continues to bring to light similar phenomena within the Church of Greece.

On a pan-orthodox level, the Moscow Patriarchate's confrontation with the Phanar continued over the issue of the Estonian Apostolic Church that was placed again under the Ecumenical Patriarchate's authority a decade ago, the limited number of Russian monks on Mount Athos and the Ecumenical Patriarchate's jurisdiction over Orthodox believers in the Diaspora. The ongoing conflict between the Moscow Patriarchate and the Church of Romania is another issue worth mentioning. The reason for this clash is that the Bucharest Patriarchate has decided to reopen three Romanian dioceses in Bessarabia, considered by the Moscow Patriarchate as Russian ecclesiastical territory.

For the Russian Church, the most important event of the year was the official agreement of reunification between the Russian Orthodox Church Outside Russia (ROCOR) and the Patriarchate of Moscow, an act that was achieved with the strong support of Russian President Vladimir Putin and that will materialize within the next year.

In the domain of the pan-orthodox dialogue with the Roman Catholics, one should note the official position, reiterated once again this summer, by the Vatican and Pope Benedict XVI with regard to Orthodoxy. According to such view the Orthodox Church is indeed an "authentic" Church but that it still manifests an important "imperfection" in that she does not accept the papal primacy. Despite such an unfavorable announcement, the 10th meeting of the International Joint Commission for the Theological Dialogue between the Orthodox and Roman Catholic Churches took place this autumn in Ravenna, Italy, where the commission drafted a joint document to serve as a basis for future dialogue.

The commission's task was not without obstacles, however, if one is to judge the stance assumed by the Russian delegation which left the meeting and subsequently claimed that the joint document cannot be considered valid as it was drafted in the absence of the "largest Orthodox Patriarchate's" delegate and that, furthermore, it should be revised by theologians and historians for the "inaccuracies" contained there-in. The Patriarchate of Moscow, as Russian Patriarch Alexios and other dignitaries of the Russian Church have insinuated, is likely to re-examine the possibility of abstaining from the pan-orthodox dialogue with the Roman Catholics as long as it has not solved its differences with other Orthodox Churches and with the Vatican itself, given the increase in Roman Catholic dioceses on Russian ecclesiastical territory in the last years.

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