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

by Justine Frangouli-Argyris

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## **Former Archbishop Spyridon Breaks A Long Silence**

by **Theodore Kalmoukos**

BOSTON - In his first interview with The National Herald since his resignation ten years ago, former Archbishop Spyridon of America said he believes that "the creation of metropolises inevitably diminishes the Archbishop's role and by definition undermines the necessary unity of the homogeneous body of Greek Americans."

The former prelate reveals that he did not seek on his own to become Archbishop of America but he was actually drafted. He said that, "I personally did not seek such election and that I was indeed directed to accept the appointment. The way I assess things today is that my ministry was meant to be temporary and served the ulterior design of those in charge at the Phanar."



*Former Archbishop of America Spyridon with philanthropist George Behrakis at the Annunciation Cathedral of New England in Boston.*

The former Archbishop has not visited the Ecumenical Patriarchate since his departure from the Archiepiscopal throne of America and he does not intend to do so.

He came to Boston and officiated at the funeral service of his dear friend Leo Condakes, as the Herald reported in its last edition.

The entire interview with former Archbishop Spyridon is presented as follows:

**TNH:** Your Eminence, what brings you to the United States and to Boston in particular?

**Spyridon:** I returned to the United States for one purpose only: to bid a last farewell to my beloved friend Leo Condakes, Archon Depoutatos of the Great Church of Christ. I wanted to be with his family as we brought him to his final resting place.

**TNH:** When did you first meet the late Leo Condakes and his wife Evanthia?

**Spyridon:** I first met Leo and Evanthia Condakes on a visit to Constantinople in the early 90s. Their invaluable service to various boards of our GOA institutions gave me an opportunity to witness first hand and appreciate their integrity and total commitment to the Church. We have ever since been close friends and shared frequent communication.

**TNH:** How does it feel to visit Boston ten years after your departure and to officiate at the Cathedral?

**Spyridon:** Since I left the USA in September 1999 I have visited Boston three or four times to see Leo and Evanthia. I am deeply grateful to His Eminence Metropolitan Methodios of Boston for arranging for me to officiate at Leo's funeral.

**TNH:** Would you like to tell us where you reside, how you keep busy and how you spend your time?

**Spyridon:** I lead a calm and solitary life, something that I aspired to all my life. I finally have the luxury to follow important events, ecclesiastical and other, with the comfort and objectivity that distance and time offer. The days and months lapse with long walks on the Atlantic coast, continuous reading and meditation.

**TNH:** Why did you select Portugal?

**Spyridon:** Ever since my childhood I was intrigued by the history of the ruler of the seas that was Portugal. Later, on a transatlantic trip, I became enchanted with the country's beauty and the warmth of the Portuguese people.

**TNH:** Do you visit Rhodes, the island where your family comes from?

**Spyridon:** In the last decade I returned to Rhodes only once, to see my family. I wish I could visit more often, because I still have strong bonds with many dear people there.

**TNH:** What thoughts go through your mind ten years after your resignation from the Archiepiscopal throne of America?

**Spyridon:** I'm happy the Archdiocese of America continues to remain a large and dynamic eparchy of the Ecumenical Throne. I pray it will be able to enhance, despite all difficulties, its efforts to preserve the purity of our ancestral faith, to keep our Orthodox traditions robust and maintain vibrant its Hellenic character. The Archdiocese has the potential to become a powerful testimony to Orthodoxy, the most persuasive of all, in the western world.

**TNH:** Are there any things you wish you would have done differently during your archiepiscopal ministry?

**Spyridon:** I still believe that the archiepiscopal initiatives undertaken at that time could not have been different, given the two major objectives of my administration: 1) to safeguard a traditional form of Orthodoxy in a multi-cultural and multi-religious country such as America, and 2) to bring the rapid de-hellenization in the Greek Orthodox community to a halt and promote Hellenism. One should also keep in mind that we had limited time to accomplish these goals.

Of course, one can always question the positions taken but I still maintain that given the same circumstances I would still make the same decisions.



*Archbishop Spyridon speaks with The National Herald's religion editor Theodore Kalmoukos about the Community while visiting the U.S.*

**TNH:** Let us go back to 1996: would you like to share some details with regard to your election as Archbishop of America? Did you seek such position yourself? Were you directed to accept the appointment by the Patriarchate? Did the then Metropolitan of Chalcedon, Joachim, support you?

**Spyridon:** I am not in a position to know what exactly took place behind the scenes and who supported my election or not. One hears so many things..., so many conflicting rumors... What I am certain of is that I personally did not seek such election and that I was indeed directed to accept the appointment.

**TNH:** Did you ever try to contact the Patriarchate after your resignation?

**Spyridon:** To this day I did not seek to contact any Patriarchal officials. There was no serious reason to do so. Whatever had to be discussed and settled at the Phanar was addressed during my last visit there in the summer of 1999 when an agreement was reached. Now, whether the agreement was upheld by both parties or not is another matter.

**TNH:** Do you intend to contact the Patriarchate in the immediate future?

**Spyridon:** I have no such plans.

**TNH:** Don't you think you are young enough that you are able to offer further service to the Church?

**Spyridon:** I offered my Church whatever I had to offer her, indeed without any reservation. I believe the future of the Church belongs now to the younger. The time has come for them to take the torch.

**TNH:** What are your feelings for Patriarch Bartholomew?

**Spyridon:** He's struggling untiringly to re-elevate the prestige of the Patriarchate on a Pan-Orthodox and international level. For this most difficult task he is in the prayers of every Greek Orthodox believer.

**TNH:** Do you believe that he betrayed and abandoned you in the last analysis?

**Spyridon:** He neither betrayed nor abandoned me. He simply implemented the plan he always had for the eparchy of America, a plan developed long before my election.

**TNH:** What are your feelings about the Greek American community?

**Spyridon:** I can only love our Greek American community and I take a sincere interest in its progress and prosperity. After all, I come from this very same community and I am proud to be one of its genuine and authentic offspring.

**TNH:** Do you miss the Greek American community?

**Spyridon:** Although I served as the religious leader of Greek Americans only for a few short years, I was blessed to have made a great number of loyal friends. I look forward to sharing time with them again.

**TNH:** In what direction is the Greek American community moving?

**Spyridon:** The Greek American community is a vigorous body with immense possibilities at all levels - religious, educational, social etc. It can also play a most significant role in the promotion of Greek national issues. Let us hope that one day it will be suitably equipped to have such possibilities materialized.

**TNH:** Where do you think the Archdiocese is how heading?

**Spyridon:** America, it is said, is the country of great and unlimited opportunities. In the case of our Archdiocese there is still an infinite number of unexplored opportunities. I can only pray that those responsible will be blessed with an inspiring vision, the "political will" and the ecclesiastical boldness to undertake a brave initiative of reform and renewal. Without such revival the Greek Orthodox community in America seems to be destined to decline and inevitably shrink.

**TNH:** Has the creation of metropolises proven detrimental or beneficial to the Archdiocese in the final analysis?

**Spyridon:** There are those who advocate the usefulness of numerous metropolises, mainly at the Phanar, and of course amongst the metropolitans themselves. On the other hand there are others who question the practicality of such a divisive structure.

It is my opinion that the creation of metropolises inevitably diminishes the Archbishop's role and by definition undermines the necessary unity of the homogeneous body of Greek Americans. As many are aware, the establishment of metropolises serves only ecclesiastico-political designs. Perhaps some other solution should have been considered in order to reconcile both concerns.

**TNH:** If you had here before you the bulk of the Greek American community, what you would say to them?

**Spyridon:** The Greek American community will prove to be a vehicle of unique historic possibilities as it becomes more and more aware of the treasure that is Orthodoxy inspired by her Hellenic soul.

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