

*www.spyridon.net*

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

by Justine Frangouli -Argyris

*Sunday Eleftherotypia* (Athens) - July 23, 2000

Archbishop Spyridon:

**"Faced with compromise or retirement, I chose retirement..."**

Interview with Justine Frangouli

After a barrage of publicity in the media and three years of a merciless war waged against him from varying orbits of power, the former Archbishop of America, His Eminence Spyridon, submitted his dramatic resignation from the office on August 18, 1999, concluding a thirty-year record of active ecclesiastical ministry.

The former Archbishop of America, made sweeping changes in both personnel and the status quo during the three years of his archpastorate, and called down on himself the fury of the "establishment." His ideas about restoring an authentic, genuine Orthodoxy, the preservation of a conscious Hellenic identity and dynamic intervention in favor of Greek national affairs seemed to make that "establishment" very uncomfortable.

Refusing his election as Metropolitan of Chaldea, the fifty-five year old Spyridon lives in a secluded retirement in Portugal, far removed from any ongoing formal ecclesiastical activity.

He keeps his distance from the lawsuit brought against the Archdiocese by a member of its own Executive Committee, inasmuch as the Archdiocese has failed to provide Spyridon his pension. Besides, Spyridon states, "Man does not live by bread alone."

\* \* \*

***Eleftherotypia: Your Eminence, what has prompted you to keep such a distance from the press?***

*Arch. Spyridon:* I consider that silence and distance from the current ecclesiastical reality were my best counselors for a period in which to gather my thoughts and re-concentrate my energies. I think I owed that to myself and moreover to my successor, a period of silence and good faith.

***Eleftherotypia: What were the reasons that led you to your decision to resign three years after your unanimous election?***

*Arch. Spyridon:* The attempts to return the Church of America to a more authentic form of Orthodoxy, the initiatives to turn back the tide of the de-Hellenization of the younger generations, and the interventions in favor of vital Greek national issues undoubtedly piqued certain major and minor decision-making centers. Quite simply, when faced with compromise or retirement, I chose retirement ....

***Eleftherotypia: How do you explain the fact that on January 12, 1999, the Patriarch laid out in no uncertain terms that you were Archbishop for life, and then not many months later, instigated your resignation?***

*Arch. Spyridon:* That is a question you should address to the Mother Church. It remains an unanswered question for a large portion of the Greek-American Community of America to this day. Personally, I have become used to the disparity between words and actions.

***Eleftherotypia: Is this information true, that it was at the instigation of Prime Minister Costas Simitis that the Patriarch directed you to resign?***

*Arch. Spyridon:* That the Prime Minister evidenced this kind of intention relative to Church affairs in America – such information does not exist. Quite the opposite. During the period that there were relentless attempts to entangle the Prime Minister in Greek-American Church affairs, he demonstrated that it was his intention for the ecclesiastical issue to clarify itself and consequently, he steered clear from becoming mixed up with a matter that did not pertain to him. Moreover, the Prime Minister had no particular problem with the ecclesiastical governance of America, especially during a time when the first bridges for substantive cooperation between Greece and the Greek Orthodox Community of America were being fashioned. I would note especially the Greek education component and the advocacy of issues of Greek national interest.

***Eleftherotypia: The Phanar is liable for the ousting of two Archbishops from their positions in the Church of America in a three-year period. Is it a commonplace phenomenon in the Orthodox Church for Hierarchs to be subverted like this?***

*Arch. Spyridon:* The events of the last three years, which you refer to, ought to be judged as isolated episodes, and only with great difficulty can they be considered as indicators of the smooth functioning of ecclesiastical institutions. As we all know, Hierarchs in the Orthodox Church are elected and serve for life. Therefore, I do not think that similar phenomena are observed frequently in other countries' Orthodox Churches, where the composition and functioning of the Synod are a little different

***Eleftherotypia: The problem of the composition of the Synod of the Patriarchate has been put forth by the Archbishop of Australia, His Eminence Stylianos. Would the events in the Eparchy of America be different if that composition were different?***

*Arch. Spyridon:* It is difficult to make up predictions and theories after the fact. But I am happy that the issue of the composition of the Synod has finally been elucidated, as was reported in the Athenian press. I read that the relevant Turkish stipulations restricting the Ecumenical Patriarchate do not relate to the composition of the Synod, but only to the election of Turkish citizens to the office of the Ecumenical Patriarch and to the positions of the four Eparchial Metropolitans in Turkey. Indeed, this clarification reveals new horizons for the renewal of the Synodical institution at the Ecumenical Patriarchate, with participation now of all its Eparchial Metropolitans, whether they serve in Turkey or in other countries. Moreover, it would not be in the interest of Turkey to continue to restrict the religious liberties of its minorities, especially at this moment when it is calling to be constituted as a full member of the European Union.

***Eleftherotypia: Why have you decided not to accept your election as Metropolitan of Chaldea? Has this decision caused a rupture in your relations with the Phanar?***

*Arch. Spyridon:* I do not think that accepting, or not, my election to the Metropolitan of Chaldea would be able to evoke a rupture in my relations with the Phanar. First, because in similar circumstances, the free consent and acceptance on the part of the interested party plays a primary role. Second, because the decision not to accept is based on specific assurances concerning the title and the self-determination of the person who retired.

***Eleftherotypia: Whence do you attribute the polemics of a group of Greek-Americans against you? Did you disturb the "establishment," or were there personal interests involved?***

*Arch. Spyridon:* I would say both. But I consider the polemics to be of no particular importance if one keeps in mind that this group had been substantially disarmed after a certain period of time. The polemics, if one would delve deeper, are unrelated to the subsequent developments, which as it later became evident, had been systematically directed by other decision-making centers.

***Eleftherotypia: Would you be able to link the instigation of the polemics against you with your predecessor?***

*Arch. Spyridon:* My revered predecessor never made a secret of his opinions about his successor. And his actions were always consistent with his opinions. *Eleftherotypia:* Does a "Patriarchal Directorate" that governs developments exist in America? *Arch. Spyridon:* Obviously there is a group of laymen and some clerics who have their own, private relations with the Mother Church and who try to direct outcomes, circumventing their own canonical ecclesiastical authority. At this moment, I do not know exactly what role the group in question is playing. At any rate, the onus is on the Mother Church to restore the prestige and the authority of the canonically elected Church authority.

***Eleftherotypia: What is your relationship with your successor. What do you believe about His Eminence Demetrios?***

*Arch. Spyridon:* My voluntary sequestration from ecclesiastical affairs for the past year has not allowed me to get to know the new Archbishop of America personally. I would not be able to express an objective judgment based solely on whatever has been reported in the press of late, whether it be negative or positive. Nevertheless, the voice of the Greek Orthodox Community calls him to take a leadership role in the advancement of Greek national issues, as well as issues of Greek culture and education, and to be sure in the question of the “de-Protestantizing,” if you will, American Orthodoxy, however high the price that he could be called to pay.

***Eleftherotypia: The issue of your pension has become embroiled, inasmuch as the Patriarchate tried to nullify the decisions of the Executive Committee. And now, a member of that Committee, Harry Pappas, has brought a legal action against the Archdiocese. How does this situation stand today?***

*Arch. Spyridon:* I have not been following this situation for some time, and especially now that, as I was informed, a legal suit was brought against the Archdiocese for violation of basic procedural norms and that the issue has taken a legal turn for solution. But be that as it may, I learned a long time ago that “Man does not live by bread alone.”

***Eleftherotypia: Your opponents labeled you as “autocratic” and “despotic” during your three-year archpastorate. How would you characterize it?***

*Arch. Spyridon:* It is natural enough that any initiative of creativity generates reactions and controversies. For my part, I consider the three years of my ministry in America as a period of bold vision and numerous initiatives in every sector of ecclesiastical life. Obviously, three years is insufficient for the materialization of great and ambitious plans, but I would like to believe that this was a reason for many priests and faithful to think long and hard about the course that they must follow, if some form of authentic Orthodoxy is to survive in America.

***Eleftherotypia: On of the problems that they attribute to you is that you did not push forward the elevation of the Dioceses of America to Metropolitanate status. Do you believe that the Archdiocese ought to be divided and that the role of the Archbishop ought to be diminished?***

*Arch. Spyridon:* I belong to those who believe that, by reason of the specific character of American society, that the unity of the Archdiocese must be ensured by every means available. Only this unity provides the guarantee that will eventually allow the Archdiocese to acquire an enduring dynamic presence and a lively role in vast arena of American public life. Without such unity, the efforts of the Archdiocese to preserve the flames of Orthodoxy and Hellenism in America will suffer and diminish as well. One should not forget that the now already completed dismemberment of the Archdiocese of North and South America has never been understood nor forgiven by the Greek Orthodox Community.

***Eleftherotypia: Do you think that the Church in America has matured to the point where it can be detached from the Mother Church? Has the time come for autonomy or semi-autonomy?***

*Arch. Spyridon:* I believe the ‘detachment’ of the Church of America from the Mother Church would have the most grievous consequences for the chances of an authentic form of Orthodoxy to survive in the American land. Of course, I know that for decades there have been various movements which in the name of Pan-Orthodoxy push – sometimes gently, sometimes harshly, for a solution that ends in autocephaly. However, this danger could become tangible only as a result of eventual failures and mistakes of the responsible Church leadership.

***Eleftherotypia: During your archpastorate, you conducted a serious study, coordinated by Professor Rassias, of the whole range of issues on Greek Education. To this day – one year later, it does not appear to have been utilized ....***

*Arch. Spyridon:* One year after the presentation of the Committee’s study to the Press, I understand that the findings concerning the problems of Greek-language education are being again echoed, but no specific initiatives have been undertaken that go in the direction of upgrading this education. It is the Archdiocese’s duty to undertake immediate major changes in this field. The time for pious wishing and postponements is way overdue.

***Eleftherotypia: Do you believe that there should be a cooperative effort with the Greek government in the field of Greek Education?***

*Arch. Spyridon:* Such cooperation would certainly be to the advantage of the Greek American Community, particularly at this moment in time when the Archdiocese is in need of helpful alliances as it responds to the high calling of the preservation of the Greek language. Inasmuch as the Archdiocese is unable to train a sufficient number of Greek teachers, I think it would be expedient to accept the offer of the Greek Government.

***Eleftherotypia: You were the originator of an initiative to coordinate all the groups of the Greek Lobby under the aegis of the Archdiocese. Where does that effort stand today?***

*Arch. Spyridon:* It was one of the most successful ventures of the Archdiocese. It was, in fact, with the coordination of the Archdiocese that all Greek American groups involved in promoting Greek national issues in the centers of American decision-making began, for the first time in their history, to move in unison, as one unit and to speak with one voice. If they would have continued in this effort, which encountered opposition from certain forums, the results could have doubtless been positive, if not superlative, for the vital issues of Hellenism.

***Eleftherotypia: How do you assess today's lack of mediation when it comes to Greek national issues? Is it true that you disturbed the Phanar with your stands on Cyprus and Kosovo?***

*Arch. Spyridon:* What I did, I did from conscience as a Christian and a Hellene. I think that by then the Greek American Community had matured beyond the immigrant ghetto and could raise its voice in favor of the inalienable rights of not only the Greek People, but any people treated unjustly. History would have never forgiven us for the loss of these golden opportunities.

***Eleftherotypia: Your position for a return to authentic Orthodoxy seemed to disturb the ecclesiastical "establishment" in America. What was your experience of Orthodoxy in America?***

*Arch. Spyridon:* The struggle of Orthodoxy in America will be both long and hard, if it is to reacquire and preserve its authentic form, by avoiding the ever-increasing influence of the American Protestant spirit, which is becoming constantly more evident in the worship and spiritual life of the faithful. This is going to require the firm resolve of the Holy Cross Theological School in Boston, to train the future clergy of America with carefully chosen professors and a well organized curriculum of studies. More than this, the School of Theology must get beyond the immigrant complex, in order to re-emphasize the role of Hellenism, of "ecumenical Hellenism," if you will, in Orthodox theology. I do not think that matters will be able to proceed for the best without a strong intervention of leadership by the Church.

***Eleftherotypia: How do you view the situation in the Church and wider Greek Orthodox Community in America today? Are there reasons to hope?***

*Arch. Spyridon:* There most certainly are! However, they require constant, steady vigilance, which keeps pace with the willingness of the Church for dynamic intervention in the most sensitive fields of Church life regardless of the "political" price which sometimes must be paid by its leaders. One thing is certain. For these living hopes to be preserved, we must start from now, without further procrastination, to build the future of Orthodoxy and Hellenism.

***Eleftherotypia: The hot button issue of the day, as you well know, is that of the recording of religion on the identity cards. What do you believe about this?***

*Arch. Spyridon:* I confess that this is a delicate matter that touches on historical and religious sensitivities. For this alone I would have expected a more flexible policy by the government. I believe that the extreme positions do not correspond with the contemporary face of Greece. It is necessary that both sides retreat a little before it is too late and they are irreversibly entrenched. The two institutions, Church and State, should work together in harmony to head off the charge of globalization, which is the real threat to Greek "identity" in the new millennium!

***Eleftherotypia: What is your impression of the Archbishop of Greece, Christodoulos?***

*Arch. Spyridon:* His Beatitude Christodoulos, Archbishop of Athens and All Greece, is most certainly an amply endowed Church leader with a Pan-Orthodox and universal shine. His ceaseless activity is quite amazing. Astonishing is also his modern, realistic manner with which he reaches out to young people, as well as his approach to contemporary social problems. I have no doubt that thanks to his inspired leadership the Church of Greece will see better and brighter days.

***Eleftherotypia: Where are you living these days, Your Eminence? How do you pass your time?***

*Arch. Spyridon:* I have returned and settled in a land that first enchanted me some thirty-eight years ago, when I traveled from America to Halki (Constantinople). It is a land where all of the elements I knew as a boy in Rhodes come together. The sea, the beautiful landscapes, the nobility of a simple people, the historical greatness of an ancient sea power and so many other things. I am finally reading books that I have never had the time to read! Then I browse the Internet for the news of the day. I have decided to stay here until new, brighter signs appear on the horizon...

*[Translated from Greek]*

---

This material comes from Spyridon.Net

<http://www.spyridon.net/>

The URL for this document is:

<http://www.spyridon.net/EN/author/spyridon.html>