

The Confessor-Hierarch Chrysostomos, Former Metropolitan of Florina and Leader of the Martyric Old Calendar Church of Greece (1870 – 7 September 1955)(*)



A S A MEAGER TRIBUTE to the sacred memory of the contemporary Confessor of Orthodoxy, Metropolitan Chrysostomos (formerly) of Florina, on the occasion of the forty-fifth anniversary of his repose, we will briefly call to remembrance certain biographical facts about him, which present in relief the majesty of soul of this elect vessel of Divine Grace, for the exemplification, support, and strengthening particularly of the new generation of the anti-innovationist *pleroma* of the Church, but also for the rekindling of its confessional boldness in our difficult days.

The ever-memorable Hierarch Chrysostomos (Kavourides) was born to pious parents on 13 November 1870 in Madytos, in Eastern Thrace. Because of his special

calling to the Church and his sagacity, he desired to study at the Theological Academy of Halki (Constantinople), where he completed his studies in 1901 with an excellent grade. That same year, he was Ordained Deacon by Patriarch Joachim III and was appointed preacher of Panormos and, later, Great Chancellor of the Patriarchate.

From the first, he was distinguished for his modest and upright character, for his great profundity and his flowing rhetorical style, for his administrative skills, and for the heroism of his soul.

On 6 August 1908, at the age of thirty-eight, he was Consecrated Bishop of Imbros and Tenedos and, in 1912, was elevated to the dignity of Metropolitan of Pelagonia, with Monastirion (now Bitola), in Northern Macedonia, as his See—a particularly crucial post during the exceptionally difficult period of the First World War and of the turbulent years which followed. There, he was engaged in remarkable ethno-religious activities. He fought on behalf of faith and homeland for the rights of Orthodoxy and Hellenism, and was hon-

ored for his activity. On account of political changes to the map of the territory of his Eparchy, however, he found himself exiled to the Holy Mountain in 1918, accompanied by his Deacon, Athenagoras (Spyrou), the subsequent Patriarch of Constantinople, unfortunately an ecumenist of notable fame!

That devotee of Canonical Order, the former Metropolitan of Pelagonia, Chrysostomos, vigorously opposed the completely unlawful and uncanonical election of the notorious Meletios Metaxakis as Oecumenical Patriarch and fled to Alexandria to preclude a possible second unjust exile. Meletios Metaxakis attempted to depose him, but his endeavor came to nothing.

Around 1926, after his brief election as Metropolitan of Filiaton and Giromerios, the courageous Hierarch Chrysostomos was placed in the newly-founded Metropolis of Florina, which he piously shepherded until 1932, at which point he resigned from his effective activity for health reasons. He remained in Athens and devoted himself to giving sermons, writing, and works of philanthropy. It was then that he began to collaborate with the anti-innovationists of the Old Calendar Church, writing articles in their official journal, *Herald of the Orthodox*, with the signature “Churchman.”

Conditions had by now ripened. The Grace of God—Which had been preparing, through Its unfathomable ways, that fighter of Orthodoxy against the innovation of the New Calendar, which marked the beginning of the heresy of ecumenism within the realm of the Church of Christ—was now calling Its obedient servant to action from a new rampart. And the elect worker of the Lord complied, as a faithful and prudent steward, and thus began the most glorious and difficult period of his life, which weaved for him the unfading golden crown of a Confessor.

In 1935, he and Metropolitans Germanos of Demetrias and Chrysostomos of Zakyntos walled themselves off from the innovationist New Calendar Church and undertook the pastorate of the heroic Old Calendar Flock, which up until that time had been without Hierarchs. This joyous and historic event, of inestimable spiritual value and importance, was sealed by a Divine Liturgy in Kolono, Athens, on 13 May 1935, which was attended by more than 25,000 Old Calendarist Faithful! The Holy Synod of the anti-innovationists was immediately established and it Consecrated four new Hierarchs, in view of the fact that the Synod of innovationists not only did not regain its senses after the appeal for rectification which the three Confessor Hierarchs addressed to it, but rather, alarmed and upset, proceeded to persecute and exile them.

The former Metropolitan of Florina, Chrysostomos, and those with him were “deposed” by the innovationists—something which constitutes a title of honor and a badge of Orthodoxy—, and he was arrested and exiled to the Monastery of St. Dionysius in Olympus. He remained there a short while only, since he was soon released.

From that time on, he devoted himself, body and soul, to the battle for the restoration of the traditions of the Fathers, to the strengthening and pastoring of the persecuted sheep of Christ and to dealing with the temptations arising from the fragmentation of the anti-innovationists, by reason of theological ignorance and inflexibility, as well as a tragic lack of an ecclesiastical ethos and charismatic tractability.

By the Grace of God, he passed through all of these difficulties with calmness of soul, liturgizing, praying, setting an example, speaking, preaching, writing, traveling, and bearing witness to the Faith, in the midst of various adversities: being reviled, persecuted, in want, afflicted, undergoing hardships, dragged to the courts, and wronged.... And all of that not only, unfortunately, by his innovationist persecutors, but also by his brothers in Christ and co-strugglers! And it would not have been humanly possible to endure it all, if he had not had a sense of the aid of Divine Grace, an iron faith, and steadfastness unto death.

In 1951, a terrible new persecution by the innovationists, under Archbishop Spyridon (Vlachos), broke out against the Orthodox Old Calendarists. The eighty-one-year-old Confessor-Hierarch Chrysostomos was arrested and exiled for fifteen months in the distant Monastery of Ipsilou, on the island of Mitylene. Once again, the diamond of his soul remained firm and brilliant, and the dew of Grace marvelously consoled him. It is telling that when his guard once visited him in his cell in exile, he saw him praying, surrounded by a dazzling, heavenly light!

During the course of this exile, his former Deacon—and, by now, Patriarch—Athenagoras proposed to him to return to the innovationists and be “reinstated,” thereby abandoning his holy struggle and principles. The Confessor-Hierarch’s dignified answer was, of course, in the negative—as a corollary of a bishop’s heart flaming with love for the Church—and it passed into history.

After his return and until his death, he continued his good fight of faith and virtue. The sanctity of his life, which was modest, proper, non-avaricious, and dignified; his nobility, morals, and general benevolence; his humble and meek character even in the most tempestuous moments of his fight; the refinement of his manners and the respect with which he dealt with everyone—even the most “inferior” to him, from every viewpoint—lent his pure being a heavenly dimension. He inspired boundless reverence in his entourage, his co-workers, and his spiritual children, but he never exploited that to impose something that went against their will or free consent. He was greatly forgiving and never flared up against his persecutors or slanderers. Similarly, never did he reprove or judge anyone for any sin, error, or fault whatsoever that he perceived. Above all pettiness and impropriety, he was marked by simplicity and unaffectedness in all of the manifestations of his life. His attire, inside and outside the Church, was befitting a Hierarch of a martyric, vicissitudinous

and persecuted Flock, without a trace of vanity, self-complacency, or provocative ostentation. The fear of God and the fulfillment of his duties were his main concern until the last days of his earthly life.

Thus, in early September 1955, having a presentiment of his end, he called for his spiritual Confessor, the charismatic Fr. John of Amfiali, in order to confess himself. Having been purified in soul and body, he asked to be laid in clean, pure-white sheets and painlessly and peacefully yielded up his pure-white soul to the Lord and God, in order to rest from his toils and pains!

Truly, “*Such a high priest became us*”!

He was buried in the Monastery of the Dormition of the *Theotokos* in Parnethos. During the disinterment of his holy Relics, a delicate, ineffable fragrance was emitted throughout the entire monastery.

May his blessing shelter us, accompany us, and strengthen us in the preservation of his sacred heritage!



* **Source:** Ἅγιος Κυπριανός, No. 298 (September-October 2000), pp. 350-351, 354.