**The 70th Anniversary of the Pan-Orthodox Congress, Part I of II**

**A Major Step on the Path Towards Apostasy**

**by Bishop Photius of Triaditsa**

Introduction: The author of this article, Bishop Photius of Triaditsa, was consecrated to the episcopacy on January 4/17, 1993 by Metropolitan Cyprian of Fili, Abbot of the Monastery of Saints Cyprian and Justina. Bishop Photius is the sole hierarch of the Old Calendarists in Bulgaria.

Professor T. Sibiff's work, *The Church Calendar Question*, which appeared a quarter of a century ago with the goal of establishing a theological basis for the Church Calendar reform instituted in Bulgaria in 1968, frequently cites the so-called "Pan-Orthodox" Congress which took place from May 10th through June 8th, 1923 in Constantinople.[1] The author cites the decisions of this congress concerning the revision of the Julian calendar,[2] which entailed replacing the Julian calendar with the so-called "New Julian calendar," which in fact corresponds to the Western Gregorian calendar until the year 2800. Professor Sibiff refers to the Congress in Constantinople, unashamedly preferring to call it an "Orthodox Gathering." For him, as for all supporters of the calendar reform, that Congress has unquestionable authority as a Church forum. At the same time, ignoring the facts cannot cover the serious canonical discrepancies of the Congress at Constantinople. According to the words of Professor C. Troitsky, "There is no doubt that future historians of the Orthodox Church will be forced to admit that the Congress of 1923 was the saddest event of Church life in the 20th century."[3] By calling itself "Pan-Orthodox" without any basis for doing so, the Congress in Constantinople opened the way to changing the Patristic Church Calendar and began the Orthodox Church's rush into modernism. In spite of the fact that, from the beginning, the decisions of the Congress were rejected by almost all local Orthodox Churches, the Congress at Constantinople succeeded in destroying the liturgical and festal unity of the Orthodox Church. The reformed calendar was gradually introduced into many local Churches. Consequently, a tragic division in the liturgical practice occurred not only among individual local Churches, but also within the local Churches themselves which had officially accepted this uncanonical innovation.

What was the spiritual-philosophical climate which gave birth to this "Pan-Orthodox" Congress in Constantinople? By whom was it initiated? Who were its delegates, and what was its canonical status? What were its activities and decisions? These are the major questions which will be dealt with briefly here.

At the end of the nineteenth and in the first decades of the twentieth century the spiritual life of Orthodox nations underwent deep shocks and changes. On one hand, among the intelligentsia and upper classes a worldly, materialistic mind-set quickly developed and became firmly established, and the understanding of spiritual values fell under the influence of powerful, neo-pagan movements in Western culture. On the other hand, theological and Church circles were poisoned by ideas growing out of Protestant ecumenism. Orthodox hierarchs and theologians began to heed the call for "the union of all Christians." The only possible path of return for those who have fallen away from the One and Indivisible Church of Christ is through repentance. The "union of all Christians" cannot be found by seeking a common language, indulging in common activities, or even in union in prayer between various confessions. In other words, the way to unity is not found along eroded and nebulous paths but rather by a repentant return to Orthodoxy.[4] Both of the encyclicals of Patriarch Joachim III of Constantinople (1879–1884; 1901–1912), which in general adhered to tradition, are nonetheless the first official documents of the Patriarch of Constantinople in which one can already sense the beginning of ecumenical views.[5]

Under the indirect influence of powerful progressive and revolutionary ideas, which had their origins in and were advocated by those initiated into Masonry [which strives to unite everyone, but denies the exclusive truth of Orthodoxy], religious free-thinking was introduced into Orthodoxy. This free-thinking was especially characteristic of the so-called Russian religious renaissance during the first decades of this century. Religious free-thinking prepared the way for renovationism in Russia — the first manifestations of modernism to form itself into an "Orthodox Church" ( in fact a new, Eastern rite Protestantism) in our century. Renovationism was a religious movement typified in post-revolutionary Russia, in its most extreme and crude forms, and in the Greek Orthodox world of the 1920's, with corresponding similarities. Illustrations of renovationist tendencies are the Council of the "Living Church" in Russia (opened April 16/29, 1923), and the "Pan-Orthodox Congress" in Constantinople (May 10–June 8, 1923), which took place at nearly the same time. In spite of the fact that the Constantinople Congress made a resolution in defense of Patriarch Tikhon and thus, in a way, separated itself from the Living Church, the decisions of both forums were nonetheless very similar: they both changed the Church Calendar, allowed second marriages for clergy and published other similar declarations, discussing reforms in the spirit of religious liberalism, unthinkable only a few years previously.

The decisive move of Constantinople towards the ecumenical spirit in Church politics was expressed in an encyclical published in January, 1920 by the *Locum Tenens*of the Patriarchal throne, Metropolitan Dorotheos of Brussa (1919–1921) under the title, "To the Christian Churches of the Whole World." The Ecumenical Patriarchate's dramatic move towards apostasy, specifically in regard to ecumenism was preceded and accompanied by many philosophical-political factors.

At the end of the First World War, Greece was a victorious nation. The defeat of Turkey brought with it unheard of success for the political group headed by the Mason, Elevtherius Venizeles (1864–1936). Greece had stood unequivocally on the side of Entente and had declared war on the governments of the Triple Alliance. After the end of the war, according to the Nice (1919) and Sevres (1920) Peace Treaties, Greece was given northern Epirus, western and almost all of eastern Thrace, the Aegean islands of Imroz, Tenedos and the Dodecanese, as well as considerable territory in Asia Minor with its center at Smyrna. Nonetheless, Venizeles' party was not satisfied by these acquisitions, but forcibly struggled to resurrect the ancient Byzantine Empire with its capital at Constantinople. The occupation of Constantinople by the Allies (March 16, 1920–October 6, 1923) seemed to hasten the fulfillment of this desire. The leaders of Church circles in Constantinople fell under the political-nationalistic spirit of the political allies of Venizeles. The Ecumenical Patriarch turned to the English occupational army rather than to the Turkish government concerning various civil questions. Metropolitan Dorotheos, as the *Locum Tenens*of the Patriarchal Throne visited countries of Western Europe in 1920, including England, in order to sway governing circles towards Greece's position. He even suggested to the great powers the idea of liquidating the Turkish government. Prime factors which encouraged the Throne of Constantinople towards ideas of ecumenism and an active collaboration with western ecumenical organizations were the national-political interests of the hierarchs of Constantinople, their hopes of receiving help from the members of the Entente against Turkey, the ever spreading plague of Christian liberalism, the ecumenical movement which developed in the post-war years, and the direct interference of politicians and Masonic hierarchs in the affairs of the Church.

In the beginning of the Encyclical of 1920 it was announced that the Church of Constantinople considered the possibility of drawing close to and having fellowship with the other "Christian Churches" despite the dogmatic differences among them. The heterodox communities were called "honored Christian Churches," which "are neither foreign nor distant but rather a family and close in Christ." They are also called "co-inheritors, which make up one body and are partakers of God's promises in Christ." The encyclical suggests the founding of "a society of Churches."[6] As a sign of the first step towards union, the encyclical suggests "the acceptance of one calendar for the universal celebrating of the main Christian holy days".[7] This document not only announced the beginning of Constantinople's betrayal, and its union with the ecumenical heresy, but it was uncanonical as well; for in fact, it was addressed by only one of the local Orthodox Churches to heretical heterodox communities, referring to them as "Christian Churches of the whole world." The encyclical spoke pretentiously concerning exceptionally important dogmatic and canonical questions in the name of all the local Churches, as if for the whole Orthodox Church. Thus the encyclical became the first public attempt by the Constantinople Throne to usurp the authority of the One, Holy, Orthodox Church.[8]

In connection with the encyclical of 1920, which was published and distributed without the agreement of the other sister Churches, the Ecumenical Patriarchate entered into official collaboration with the representatives of the ecumenical movement. In August 1920 in Geneva, the Ecumenical Patriarchate took part in the preliminary congress on questions of "Faith and Organization", without the consent of the other Orthodox Churches.

Almost a year later the newly elected Ecumenical Patriarch Meletius IV (1921–1923), about whom we will write in detail below, announced in his enthronement address, "I give myself over to serving the Church from its first Cathedra to develop, as much as possible, closer, friendlier relations with the non-Orthodox churches of the East and West and to advance the work of union between us."[9] This same ecumenical creed was confessed by the friend and cohort of Meletius IV, Chrysostomos, Archbishop of Athens (1923–1938) who introduced the New Calendar into the Church of Greece. This is what the latter said in his enthronement speech, "…for such collaboration [with the heterodox] it is not necessary to have common ground or dogmatic union, the union of Christian love is sufficient."[10]

The close connection with European politics after the war, with the ecumenical movement, and with Masonic circles in Greece and abroad brought about by the hierarchy's nationalistic strivings in Constantinople produced the most bitter fruit at the beginning of the 1920's when Meletius IV (1871–1935) ascended to the Throne of Constantinople and became the organizer and inspiration for the "Pan-Orthodox" Congress of 1923.

Who was Meletius Metaxakis?

His name in the world was Emmanuel Metaxakis. He was born on September 21, 1871 in the village of Parsas on the island of Crete. He entered the Seminary of the Holy Cross in Jerusalem in 1889. He was tonsured with the name Meletius and ordained a hierodeacon in 1892. He completed the theological courses at Holy Cross and was assigned as secretary to the Holy Synod in Jerusalem by Patriarch Damianos in 1900. Meletius was evicted from the Holy Land by Patriarch Damianos, along with the then administrator Chrysostomos, later Archbishop of Athens in 1908 for "activity against the Holy Sepulcher."[11] Meletius Metaxakis was then elected Metropolitan of Kition in 1910. In the years before the war Metropolitan Meletius began successful talks in New York with representatives of the Episcopal Church of America, with the intention of "expanding relations between the two Churches."[12]

After the death of Patriarch Joachim III on June 13, 1912, Meletius was nominated as a candidate for the Patriarchal Throne in Constantinople.[13] However, the Holy Synod decided that Meletius could not canonically be registered as a candidate.[14] With the support of his political allies and acquaintances he was uncanonically elevated to the position of Archbishop of Athens in 1918, but after the usual political changes he was deprived of his see. His place was taken, on December 10, 1920, by the rightful canonical candidate, Theocletos, who had previously been unjustly deposed as Archbishop. While Meletius was still Archbishop of Athens, he along with a group of like-minded persons visited England where he conducted talks concerning the union between the Anglicans and the Orthodox Church. In February 1921 Meletius visited the United States. On December 17, 1921, the Greek Ambassador in Washington sent a message to the prefect at Thessalonica stating that Meletius "vested, took part in an Anglican service, knelt in prayer with Anglicans, venerated their Holy Table, gave a sermon, and later blessed those present."[15]

At this time preliminary hearings were conducted, organized by the university professor Paul Karolidis concerning complaints against Meletius Metaxakis. It was decided that Meletius should be summoned to court before the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece. The Synod published a report on November 21, 1921 calling for "investigative committee" against Meletius.[16] Although the investigation was proceeding against Metaxakis, he was nonetheless unexpectedly elected Patriarch of Constantinople. Despite the election, the Holy Synod of the Church of Greece deposed Meletius Metaxakis on December 29, 1921 for a series of infractions against canon law and for causing a schism.[17] In spite of this decision Meletius Metaxakis was enthroned as the Ecumenical Patriarch on January 24, 1922. Under intense political pressure Meletius' deposition was uncanonically lifted on September 24, 1922. Political circles around Venizeles and the Anglican Church had been involved in Meletius' election as Patriarch.[18] Metropolitan Germanos (Karavangeis) of the Holy Synod of Constantinople wrote of these events, "My election in 1921 to the Ecumenical Throne was unquestioned. Of the seventeen votes cast, sixteen were in my favor. Then one of my lay friends offered me 10,000 lira if I would forfeit my election in favor of Meletius Metaxakis. Naturally I refused his offer, displeased and disgusted. Then one night a delegation of three men unexpectedly visited me from the "National Defense League" and earnestly entreated me to forfeit my candidacy in favor of Meletius Metaxakis. The delegates said that Meletius could bring in $100,000 for the Patriarchate and, since he had very friendly relations with Protestant bishops in England and America and therefore could be useful in international causes. International interests demanded that Meletius Metaxakis be elected Patriarch. Such was also the will of Elevtherius Venizeles. I thought over this proposal all night. Economic chaos reigned in the Patriarchate. The government in Athens had stopped sending subsidies, and there were no other sources of income. Regular salaries had not been paid for nine months. The charitable organizations of the Patriarchate were in a critical economic state. For these reasons and for the good of the people [or so thought the deceived hierarch] I accepted the offer…"[19] Thus, to everyone's amazement, the next day, November 25, 1921, Meletius Metaxakis became the Patriarch of Constantinople.

The uncanonical nature of his election became evident when, two days before the election, November 23, 1921, there was a proposal made by the Synod of Constantinople to postpone the election on canonical grounds. The majority of the members voted to accept this proposal. At the same time, on the very day of the election, the bishops who had voted to postpone the election were replaced by other bishops. This move allowed the election of Meletius as Patriarch. Consequently, the majority of bishops of the Patriarchate of Constantinople who had been circumvented met in Thessalonica. They announced that, "the election of Meletius Metaxakis was done in open violation of the holy canons, " and proposed to undertake, "a valid and canonical election for Patriarch of Constantinople." In spite of this, Meletius was confirmed on the Patriarchal Throne.[20]

Under pressure from Meletius, the Patriarchate of Constantinople accepted the validity of Anglican orders in 1922 — an act which even Rome protested against. Then in 1923 Meletius initiated the "Pan-Orthodox" Congress (May 10–June 8). On June 1st, clergy and laymen dissatisfied with the innovating Patriarch held a meeting which ended in an attack on the Phanar with the goal of deposing Meletius and expelling him from Constantinople. On July 1, 1923, on the pretext of illness and the need for medical treatment, Meletius left Constantinople. On September 20, 1923, under pressure from the Greek government and through the intervention of Archbishop Chrysostomos of Athens, Meletius retired as Patriarch.

Meletius was then nominated as second candidate to the Throne of the Patriarchate of Alexandria in 1926. The first candidate was Metropolitan Nicholas of Nubia. According to the normal procedure the first candidate should have been elected Patriarch. Nonetheless, the Egyptian government, having delayed a whole year, confirmed Meletius as Patriarch on May 20, 1926.

As Patriarch, "at the cost of disapproval and division," Meletius instituted the New Calendar in the Alexandrian Patriarchate.[21] While still Patriarch of Constantinople he had established ties with the Russian "Living Church." The synod of the "Living Church" wrote on the occasion of the election of Meletius as Patriarch of Alexandria, "The Holy Synod [of the renovationists] recall with sincere best wishes the moral support which Your Beatitude showed us while you were yet Patriarch of Constantinople by entering into communion with us as the only rightfully ruling organ of the Russian Orthodox Church."[22]

As the head of an ecclesiastical delegation Meletius Metaxakis took part in the Conference at Lambeth in 1930 and undertook measures for talks on union with the Anglicans.[23]

Finally, although critically ill, Meletius offered himself as a candidate for Patriarch of Jerusalem, but no election took place. Metropolitan Methodius Kondostanos (1942–1967) wrote, "This exile from the Holy Land, from Kition, from Athens, from Constantinople, Meletius Metaxakis — an unstable, restless, power-hungry spirit, an evil demon — had no qualms about grabbing for the Throne of Jerusalem even from Alexandria in his desire to extend himself."[24] Meletius Metaxakis died on July 28, 1935, and was buried in Cairo.

After considering all this biographical information it should not surprise one that Meletius was a Mason. In connection with his election as Metropolitan of Kition, Meletius was initiated into Masonry in Constantinople as a member of the Masonic Lodge "Harmony," as reported in the Journal *Pathagore-Equerre* (Vol. IV, Part 7–8, 1935).[25]

In 1967 the founding committee of "Masonic Bulletin," the journal of the Great Lodge of Greece assigned the Mason, Alexander Zervuldakis the task of writing a monograph in which he describes Meletius as, "another shining star which glitters and illumines the firmament of the Greek Orthodox Church."[26] Zervuldakis compiled a detailed biography of Meletius Metaxakis, whom he met while Metaxakis was still in Constantinople during those tragic days for Greece after the defeat in the 1922 war with Turkey. "I greeted him like a Mason greets another Mason," wrote Zervuldakis; Metaxakis smiled and said, "I see that you understand me."[27] From Zervuldakis' monograph we know that Meletius first met with Masons in Constantinople in 1906. Full cooperation between Meletius and the Greek Masons in Constantinople began in 1908. The Masons with whom he met began to act forcefully in order to make "that investigative and curious spirit of Meletius… decide…to follow the example of many English and other foreign bishops and to…dedicate himself to the hidden mysteries of Masonry".[28] Meletius is registered in the "Harmony" lodge in Constantinople as No. 44. He was initiated in 1909. Concerning this, Zervuldakis emphasizes, "I remember the joy and pride expressed by all the brotherhood over Meletius' initiation when he was elected into our lodge."[29] "After his initiation," continues Zervuldakis, "Brother Meletius spread Masonic activity everywhere he went during the entire gamut of his tumultuous life."[30] "There are very few," the Greek Mason concludes, "who, like Brother Meletius, accept Masonry and make it the experience of their life. It was a great loss to us that he was so quickly called into eternity."[31]

Meletius' main cohorts in the calendar reformation were the men briefly mentioned above: Metropolitan Chrysostomos Papadopoulos and Gamilkar Alivizatos, professor of the theological school of Athens. In 1923 the Greek government created an electoral synod consisting of five men who elected, by three votes, Archimandrite Chrysostomos Papadopoulos, then professor of theology, as Archbishop of Athens on February 23, 1923. The faculty of the theological school of Athens prepared a recommendation for him, "through the initiative of Professor G. Alivizatos and with the approval of E. Venizeles and Patriarch Metaxakis."[32] The election was uncanonical.[33] Nevertheless, Chrysostomos was consecrated as Archbishop of Athens two days later by the three bishops who had voted for him. During this period Metropolitan Germanos (Karavangelos), mentioned above, prepared to flee Athens. Many of his friends proposed him as a candidate for Archbishop of Athens, but Prime Minister Gonatas and the synodal bishops convinced them to elect Chrysostomos Papadoupoulos.[34]

Thus we see that the Church Calendar reform instituted at the "Pan-Orthodox" Congress in 1923 was invented and created primarily by the uncanonical bishop of Athens, Chrysostomos, the deposed Metropolitan Meletius Metaxakis, who was illegally elected to the Throne of Constantinople, and Professor G. Alivizatos. Both "hierarchs" maintained close ties with Protestants in America and England. Both acquired their sees by the active interference of secular authorities. They were both, therefore, obliged to comply with the wishes of the Masonic and political circles which had put them forward as candidates.

As Saint Basil the Great wrote, "Those who gain power are the slaves of those who helped them gain it."

***Endnotes for Part I***

1) Sibev T., *The Church Calendar Question*, Synodal Publishing, 1968, pp 33–34, 54, 58, 62, 64 (in Bulgarian).

2) Ibid., pp 33–34.

3) Troitsky C., "Together We Will Struggle With Danger," *Journal of the Moscow Patriarch*, 1950, No. 2, p. 46 (in Russian).

4) Archimandrite Constantine, *Pastoral Theology*, Part II, Holy Trinity Russian Orthodox Monastery, Jordanville, New York, 1961, pp 9–10, (in Russian).

5) Tsetsis, G. *The Contribution of the Ecumenical Patriarch in the Establishment of the World Council of Churches*, Katerini, 1988, pp 31–51 (in Greek).

6) Quoted from, *Seventy Years of Ecumenistic Apostasy*, Chapters 18–21, p.99 (in Greek).

7) Quoted from, *The Inspiration and Moving Spirits of the Innovations: The Two Luthers of the Orthodox Church*, chapter 17, p. 74 (in Greek).

8) Buevsky, A., *The Patriarch of Constantinople, Meletius IV, and the Russian Orthodox Church*, 1953, No.3, p. 30 (in Russian).

9) *The Inspiration and Moving Spirits…,*chapter 17, p.74.

10) Ibid

11) Mpatistatou, D. *Proceeding and Decisions of the Pan-Orthodox Council in Constantinople*, 10.5–8.6.1923, Athens, 1982 (in Greek).

12) Buevsky, p. 29.

13) Delimpasis, A. D., *Pascha of the Lord, Creation, Renewal, and Apostasy*, Athens, 1985, p.661 (in Greek).

14) The closest co-workers in ideology of Meletius Metaxakis were Metropolitan (Strinopoulos), who later became the exarch of Western Europe and the permanent representative of the Patriarchate of Constantinople at ecumenical conferences, Archimandrite Chrysostomos (Papadopoulos), who later became Archbishop of Athens, and the famous ecumenist, G. Alivizatos, professor of theology in Athens.

15) Delimpasis, A.D. op. cit., p. 661.

16) Ibid.

17) Ibid.

18) Mpatistatou, D., op. cit., page d.

19) See Delimpasis A. D., p.662.

20) Ibid. p. 663.

21) See *The Church Herald*, No. 13, 1929, p. 152 (in Bulgarian).

22) See quote from Buevsky, op. cit., p. 36.

23) The council of all the bishops of the Anglican Church which is held at the residence of the Archbishop of Canterbury every ten years. At the Lambeth conference decisions were discussed and made concerning catechism, morality, Church order and practice, relations between Churches, etc.

24) Quoted from, Mpatistatou, D,. op. cit., p. e.

25) Quoted from Troitsky, op. cit., p. 37.

26) "The Ecumenical Patriarch Meletius Metaxakis (1871–1935) a) the Masons, b) the Innovators, c) the Ecumenists," OEM, 1990, I–XII, Chaps. 18–21, p. 149 (in Greek).

27) Ibid.

28) Ibid., p. 151.

29) Ibid., p. 152.

30) Ibid., P. 151.

31) Ibid., p. 152.

32) Delimpasis, A. D., op. cit., p. 663.

33) Ibid.

34) Ibid.

Abbreviations:

OEM — *Orthodox Origins and Martyria*, published by the Holy Synod, tri-monthly.

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