

Evyenios Voulgaris, Archbishop of Slaviansk and Kherson (Alexandros Christodoulou)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



(Corfu 11 August 1716 - Saint Petersburg 10 June 1806)

Evyenios Voulgaris, a learned clergymen and eminent educator of the Greek nation, is one of the most outstanding figures among modern Greeks and, with his conscious promotion of Orthodoxy, he contributed to a general awakening among them. He was born on Corfu in 11 August 1716 and was given the name Eleftherios. He was given the name Evyenios when he was ordained deacon in 1737 or 1738. He spent his childhood on Zakynthos, where his father came from, and on Corfu.

The basic source for the *Life* of Evyenios until he went to Russia, is the brief biography by George Ainian (early 19th century). In general, the information he provides reflects the actual events. On his life in Russia, we have the study by Stephen Batalden, which is based on information gathered by the author from his research in Russian archives.



He studied initially on Corfu under the tutelage of priest-monk Ieremias Kavvadias before spending some time with Antonios Katiforos (1685-1763) on Zakynthos. It was from these two teachers that he became acquainted with theology, apart from his personal involvement with Holy Scripture and the Patristic tradition. Naturally, the information we have about his studies at this time is sadly lacking. His older biographers report that he studied in Arta 'where the headmaster was a certain sage called Athanasios'. He then went on to Ioannina as a student of Methodios Anthrakitis.

We do not know where he was between 1738 and 1742. It has been suggested that he was probably on Zakynthos serving as a priest, though there is also some speculation that he may have been helped by prominent people in Ioannina to go to Italy to study. There is information that he was in Venice for two or three years, but there is no proof that he studied at the famous University of Padua. In Venice he taught at the Thomas Flanginos school and served as a preacher in Saint George's church. His interests were manifold: Ancient Greek, Latin and Hebrew literature, theology, natural sciences, foreign languages and, above all, modern European philosophy. What we still do not know, however, is where he studied the philosophy which he later introduced into schools in Greece, which was still under Turkish occupation at that time.

In 1742, the Maroutsis brothers, rich Epirote merchants in Venice, founded a school of higher education in Ioannina and appointed Voulgaris to run it. When, at the age of 26, he accepted the position of headmaster at the Maroutseion School, he was already one of the best-educated students of philosophy of his time. He was

determined to establish a new model of philosophy and education in the spiritual life. At the school, from 1742 to early 1746, he taught the mathematics of Newton and Leibniz, Locke's empiricism and the philosophical ideas of Thomas Hobbes and Wolf, among others. Voulgaris' innovations provoked the opposition and jealousy of Vasilopoulos Balanos (1690-1760), a 'conservative' teacher of a competitor, the Ghioumas school in Ioannina, and in the end he was forced to resign. In 1746, he left Ioannina and took up the headmastership of a school in Kozani, where he taught until 1750. Then, on the intervention of the Maroutsis brothers, he returned to Ioannina, where he retained his position until 1752.

The ten years which Evyenos spent in the teaching profession gave him a reputation throughout Greece. With a sigillium, Patriarch Kyrillos V, in May 1750, set the curriculum for the Athoniada School, and this included the teaching of Theology: *'a school of higher learning for Greek lessons, for the miscellaneous learning and teaching of the disciplines of logic, philosophy and theology...'*, and in the spring of 1753, appointed Evgenios director. The school had been founded three years earlier by the Monastery of Vatopaidi and it received both monks and laymen. In the document appointing him, the Patriarch described Evyenos as *'a most educated man, learned and adorned with and practiced in all manner of knowledge, well able to teach students not only the art of grammar and logic, but also philosophy and the mathematical sciences, as well as whatsoever belongs to moral philosophy, since he is sufficiently well versed in these'*. He added that he was *'someone who, with philosophy, was able to teach the future clerics and shepherds of the Christian people the sound dogmas of our faith'*. The mission of the school was to offer future clergymen and shepherds a high standard of philosophical and theological education. It is certain that Voulgaris would have taught theology as he describes it in his 'Theological Treatise' though he did not actually use this book. His student, Saint Athanasios Parios, in his own 'Survey' does not reject any element of theology which he learned from his great teacher.

At the school, he taught logic, an introduction to philosophy, metaphysics, arithmetic, geometry, physics and cosmography, using his own translations of works by Western European philosophers, mathematicians and physicists. His time at the school was the most productive in his teaching career. He was mentor to other great teachers of the Greek nation- Saints of the Church- such as Athanasios Parios and Kosmas Aitolos.

Six years later, however, in January 1759, he was forced to retire, because opposition groups within the academy, and, in particular his estrangement from Patriarch Kyrillos V, made it difficult for him to continue. He withdrew to Thessaloniki for a few months. In the autumn of that year, through the good offices of 'Prince Grigorios Ghikas, the interpreter at that time of the king of the Ottomans,

a polymath and warm supporter of educated men', he was called to Constantinople to assume the headmastership of the Patriarchal Academy (the Great School of the Greek Nation). Patriarch Serafeim II Anninos, who assigned this duty to Evyenios, was the man ordained him deacon, and the only representative of the Ecumenical Patriarchate to be present at his consecration, in Moscow, as Archbishop of Slaviansk and Kherson.

After he had assumed his responsibilities, the patriarchate announced that the school would be raised a level. Its letter states that: *'in the reigning city, an open school of higher education has been established, for the teaching of both secular education and our holy theology, to which has been appointed as director and teacher, the most righteous and well-read Evyenios esquire, a most wise and learned polymath, of long experience'*.

He remained in Constantinople as a teacher at the Patriarchal School for three years. He resigned because of attacks and jealousy, but remained in the city as the guest of the former Prince of Moldavia and Wallachia, Grigorios Ghikas.

Frustrated by the continuous reaction against his teaching and by the difficulties involved in going on with his work, he felt obliged to leave Greece and spent the remainder of his life in Greek communities abroad, where he devoted himself to ecclesiastical duties and to the publication of his works. Initially he went to Wallachia, to Bucharest, where he lived for about a year. He 'was received' there by the Prince of Wallachia, Constantin Racoviță and his successor, Ștefan Racoviță. From there, at the beginning of 1764, he went to Leipzig, where he lived for eight years. It appears that one of the aims of his stay there was to carry out his writing and publishing programme, which the vicissitudes of the preceding years had prevented him from doing. In 1766, he published his *Logic*, a work that was already well known and exceptionally popular in Greek intellectual circles.

In Leipzig, he had the opportunity to deal more systematically with the defence of Orthodoxy against the Uniate threat. In the translation of the treatise *On the dissensions of the Churches in Poland*[1], which was published in Leipzig, 'without name or place for fear of the Western Church', he refers to the Uniate policy of the Church of Rome and the rights of the Orthodox and Protestants in Poland vis-à-vis the Romans. He also adds copious historical and critical notes, which provide evidence of the serious problems faced by the Orthodox in Poland. In the same year that the treatise was published, 1767, Catherine the Great invaded Poland as the defender of the Orthodox and on the pretext of preventing civil war.

[To be continued]

[1]Voltaire, *Essai historique et critique sur les dissensions des églises de Pologne*, (1767).