

Greek Monasticism in the 19th Century [3] (Protopresbyter George Metallinos)

[Ξένες γλώσσες / In English](#)



The Spiritual Continuation

However, the most substantive problem that always faces monasticism is not so much the external organization and the quantitative elements, as its internal state, its spiritual life, without which monasticism, this ark of the God-given way of being, which has preserved the ecclesiastical authenticity through the ages, turns out to be salt that has lost its taste and a lamp that has gone out.[xxxii] A representative anthology of witnesses allows certain conclusions in this direction. According to Ecumenical Patriarch Ioakeim the Third, Karyes, the capital of the Holy Mountain, presented “an image of a very troubled city with all of the evils that go along with it.” He adds, however, that “asceticism is not affected at all.”[xxxiii]



The historian Phil. Vafeidis, at the beginning of the twentieth century also notes that, “we cannot say that the monastic life was in a state of growth, however it preserved the ancient rules and traditions.”[xxxiv] And truly, the great spiritual-hesychastic bodies, which continued their philokalian tradition were still active.[xxxv] The critical observations of the Bishop of Dimitriadis (Archbishop of Greece of blessed memory) Christodoulos, as regards the Greek monasteries should not be forgotten, “The monasteries,” he notes, “rather than becoming spiritual base of operations and lighthouses of the Christian spirit, were used either as places to store dubious materials, or simply to cover economic needs of ecclesiastical life.”[xxxvi] And he continues, “No one during this period worked strenuously to create, from the beginning, a Greek monastic tradition worthy of the glorious history of Orthodox monasteries.”[xxxvii]

The problem of the spiritual identity, especially of the Holy Mountain, as constitutive of the monastic life, especially in relation to the international political developments in the area of the Balkans, was considered in all of its complexity by Kosmas Phlamiatos, a “monk in the world” and hesychast from Kefalonia (1786-1852).[xxxviii] And, as future developments show, it was not all a question of “catastrophism,”[xxxix] but of a clear understanding of the reality of the situation. Phlamiatos, as we have repeatedly noted,[xl] emphasized the danger that the Holy Mountain was in, and as a consequence, asceticism, expressing at the same time his certainty of its redeemed continuation.[xli]

According to him, Athonite monasticism remained, “the most official form of the unique battalion and life,” preserving, “by divine grace...the holy example of Orthodox conduct.”[xlii] In his era (the middle of the nineteenth century) it was “the only Orthodox part, which remained unadulterated and unaffected by the western influence,” because, “it was nearly completely unsusceptible to delusion.”[xliii] This judgment, of course, concealed a comparison with what was happening in the newly created Greek State. However, moved by the Greek experience (1833 and following) he condensed his agony about the Holy Mountain into one sentence, “Be careful, for the unique form is in danger of error.”[xliv]

In fact, he convincingly developed his thoughts regarding a particular plan, which was developed by the superpower of that era (Great Britain), for the fall of the Holy Mountain affected from within, with the appointment of abbot-institutions with a worldly spirit, which would bring about the alteration of monastic life and thus, the destruction of monasticism.[xlv] In fact, this process had first happened in the west with its frankicization, and Phlamiatos had enough education to know what had happened in the west.

The Survival of the Orthodox Spirit

As much criticism as Phlamiatos offered, however, his reasoning is tempered by an optimistic certainty that the Orthodox monastic spirit will not be lost. He himself, furthermore, was a bearer and continuation of the monastic tradition of St. Gerasimos[xlvi] and of the Great Caves monastery,[xlvii] as was his co-struggler Papoulakos (Christopher Panayiotopoulos).[xlviii] Through the stubbornness of our teachers, who regarded these two as witnesses of the tradition “uneducated, the memory of whom was quickly erased,”[xlix] today doctoral dissertations are being prepared on them, even from outside the halls of theology.

The asceticism of Phlamiatos and of Papoulakos, “fruits of monastic piety,”[l] with their constant reference to the Holy Mountain, constitutes the certain verification of the continuation of the hesychastic spiritual life, though to a limited extent, in contrast to the more general spiritual sickness. The same tradition, as regards its actions in any case, is witnessed to by the General Makriyannis and the circle of Alexandros Papadiamandis. The theoretical support of the patristic Orthodox monastic spirit is offered through the liturgical books, which never ceased to spiritually feed the monasteries and parishes. The continuing presence of ascetic personalities offered a pole of attraction for those pious souls who sought authentic spiritual direction in their ascetic struggle.

The monasteries of Chios[l] provide clear examples of the hesychastic tradition, with the constant spiritual influence of the holy Kollyvades fathers (Macarios of Corinth, Athanasius of Paros, and so on).[lii] Nea Moni (closed to women until 1931),[liii] in particular, with its sketes and hesychastirions (on Mount Provateio and Penthodos) was one such example.[liv] The ascetic Pachomius, as is known to all who are familiar with the life of St. Nectarios,[lv] was his ascetic model, and his spiritual crutch in the shaping of his hesychastic consciousness,[lvi] which was perfected through his spiritual apprenticeship in the “Garden of the Panagia,” such that he became, “an Athonite in his heart.”[lvii]

It is probably unobjectionable that the practice of Elder Pachomius (who founded

the Parthenon Monastery on Mount Frangovouni, which was completed in 1901, marked by a venerable life, a coenobitic structure, and an austerity that did not permit for women visitors) was the model for St. Nectarios's Monastery of the Holy Trinity (1904), which was also organized according to the Church's ancient monastic system. The case of St. Nectarios, who ends up, in his turn, as the model for those who came afterwards,[lviii] confirms the fact that the patristic hesychastic tradition continues unceasingly in Orthodoxy, because whatever is true of the Greek-speaking areas, is equally true for our brethren in the countries of the Balkans.

Conclusions

Monasticism, within the framework of the ethnarchy and of the Greek State during the nineteenth century appeared, as regards quantity, to be in a state of decline in relation to the past. Not only was it no longer necessary to take refuge in the monasteries, but the new European spirit also strengthened the tendency to turn away from the monastic life. Furthermore, within its borders, the Greek State undermined the monasteries that remained after the dissolution of most of them (1833), so much so that it is totally justified, as regards the Greek reality, to speak of a "crisis" and "collapsed," state that would continue past the middle of the twentieth century.

From the perspective of quality, however, and faithfulness to the tradition, despite a more general laxity, there can in no way be talk of the death, or of a general muteness, especially on Athos. The grace of God preserved the embers of the hesychastic tradition in its blessed pockets, which reignited today's rebirth.

[xxxii] See Matthew 5:13.

[xxxiii] P. Vapheidou, *ibid*, p. 153.

[xxxiv] *M.E.E.*, volume 12, p. 330.

[xxxv] See Hieromonk Anthony, *Lives of Athonites During the Nineteenth Century*, volumes 1 and 2, Ormylia 1994 and 1995. See volume 1, p. 18 and following, 23 and following.

[xxxvi] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

[xxxvii] Ibid., p. 69.

[xxxviii] See Fr. George D. Metallinos, "A witness to the Orthodox tradition in the Greek State," in *Hellenism in Suspension...*, *ibid.*, p. 131 and following.

[xxxix] N. Zacharopoulos, "Catastrophism for the ecclesiastical-political situation of Greece in the middle of the nineteenth century. Two unpublished letters of K. Phlamiatos," in *Diakonia (homage to the memory of Vasilios Stogiannos)*. Thessalonica 1988, p. 407-443.

[xl] See footnote 38 and also, Fr. George D. Metallinos, "Two Kefalonian Fighters Confronting, K. Phlamiatos and K. Typaldos, Levkosia 1980 (reprint from the magazine, *The Apostle Barnabas*, 1979 and 1980).

[xli] Fr. George D. Metallinos, "A witness....," *ibid.*, p. 154 and following.

[xlii] *Ibid.*, p. 154.

[xliii] *Ibid.*.

[xliv] *Ibid.*, p. 156.

[xlv] *Ibid.*.

[xlvi] Regarding the patristic nature of K. Phlamiatos, see *by the same*, p. 137.

[xlvii] See the article of N. Bougatsou, *ΘΗΕ* 11 (1967), 1174 and following.

[xlviii] See the article of T. A. Gritsopoulos, *ΘΗΕ* 10 (1966), 14 and following.

[xlix] G. I. Konidari, *Ecclesiastical History of Greece*, volume 2, Athens 1970, p. 253.

[l] Vasilios Yioultsis, *ibid.*, p. 173.

[li] See I. M. Andreadou, *History of the Orthodox Church in Chios*, Part 1, Athens 1940, p. 221 and following.

[lii] *Ibid.*, p. 115, 118.

[liii] Ibid., p. 232-276, 247.

[liv] Ibid., p. 328 and following, and 323 and following.

[lv] See St. Nectarios of Pentapolis, *Unpublished Letters to Elder Pachomius*, edited by Barbara Giannakopoulos, Athens 1992.

[lvi] See Monk Theoklitos of Dionysiou, *St. Nectarios: Hierarch, Intellectual, Ascetic*, 1970.

[lvii] P. G., "St. Nectarios and the Holy Mountain," in the magazine *The Venerable Gregory*, 3, 1978, p. 60-62. See also, Monk Theoklitos of Dionysiou, *St. Nectarios of Aegina, the Wonderworker*, *ibid.*, p. 73 and following.

[lviii] See Archimandrite George Kapsanis, "The teaching on monasticism of the holy hierarchs Gregory Palamas and Nectarios of Pentapolis the wonderworkers," in the volume, *Proceedings from the Pan-Hellenic Monastic Conference (18-20 April 1990)*, Holy Meteora 1990, p. 179-191. See also, Monk Theoklitos of Dionysiou, *St. Nectarios of Aegina*, *ibid.*, p. 311 and following.