

HELLENIC REPUBLIC
THE HOLY SYNOD OF THE CHURCH OF GREECE
SPECIAL SYNODICAL COMMITTEE ON CULTURAL IDENTITY

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COMMUNIQUÉ

*A reply to unhistorical views
regarding the part of the Orthodox Church in
the 1821 Greek War of Independence*

The Holy Synod of the Church of Greece wishes to point out that, had it not been for the Orthodox clergy, the great national uprising of 1821 would not have been successful. Certain propagandists of outdated ideologies may deny the part that the Orthodox Church played in it, as became apparent again in recent publications and TV programmes. They prove themselves to be not only unhistorical but biased and spiteful. The French Consul François Pouqueville, who witnessed the events of the Greek Revolution, notes that 100 Patriarchs and Bishops were put to death during the Turkish Rule and the ensuing national struggle. Bishops led most of the 80 rebellions mounted by Greeks before 1821. May we remind of the fact that from 1680 to 1700 Eastern Central Greece freed itself following a revolt led by two Bishops, Ierotheos of Thebes and Philotheos of Salona. The 1821 Revolution is drenched in the blood of Patriarch Gregory V and Patriarch Cyril VI of Andrianoupolis. Apart from Bishop Germanos of Patras who blessed the standard of the Revolution at Saint Lavra on March 17, 1821 and in Patras on March 25, 1821, it was Isaiah of Salona who declared the Revolution in Phokis and marched to his own sacrifice at Alamana. It was for this purpose, too, that the Patmian Patriarch Theophilos Pankostas of Alexandria arrived at the Holy

Island to raise the standard of Revolution himself and never to return to his patriarchal throne.

As of early March 1821 most Bishops of the Peloponnese were put to jail by the Pasha of Tripolitsa, and only three of them were found alive when Greeks recaptured that town 6.5 months later. Let us not be oblivious to such sacrifices of clergymen. In Cyprus, Archbishop Cyprian was initiated to the "Society of Friends" ("*Filiki Etairia*" in Greek). The Turks found out about that and on July 9, 1821, a great slaughter took place in Nicosia, whereby Cyprian was put to death and along with him all the Bishops and Archimandrites of the island, including its political leaders.

Many other Bishops played a crucial part in the national Fight such as Anthimos of Elos, Theodoretos of Vresthena, Iosseph of Androussa, and Neophytos of Talantion. During the consecrated Exit of Missolonghi, it was Bishop Iosseph of Rogai, auxiliary bishop to the Metropolitan Porphyrius of Arta, who sacrificed himself by blowing up the powder keg on the islet of Anemomylos.

Moreover, the part that the Church played, by means of its holy vestment bearers, in the moral and spiritual preparation of 1821, was not only feisty but universally acknowledged. The Greek-Orthodox spirit and the national identity were preserved thanks to education, which was precisely the task *par excellence* of the Orthodox clergy. In schools, whether underground or overt, depending on the conditions prevailing at each time, it was priests who taught Greek children their faith and their language and instilled the desire for freedom in their souls. Hieromonk Saint Cosmas of Ætolia, whose 300th birth anniversary is celebrated this year, set up two-hundred schools and preached the hope for "*the thing desired*", i.e. liberation, to hundreds of towns and villages. Neomartyrs, the first to have resisted against slavery, refused to become "*Christians Turn'd Turks*" and did not cower before the executioner. The spiritual support and encouragement of these

latter was in the hands of clergymen, the so-called “*anointers*”, to whom they confessed.

We are aware of the rumour disseminated by some that the Ecumenical Patriarchate supposedly excommunicated Rhigas Pheraios. However, this is inaccurate, the truth being that, following threats and burdensome pressures on the part of the Sultan, Patriarch Gregory V sent out an Epistle to the Metropolitan Anthimos of Smyrna in which he did express serious reserves regarding the document drafted by Rhigas and entitled “*New Political Administration*”, though with no demerit at all for the personality of this Martyr of our Nation.

It is an easy task to rewrite History *at libitum*. Nonetheless, history and historiography are founded upon the study of sources. Personal interpretations or misinterpretations may be mere proofs of bigotry, ostrich policy or mere ignorance of the sources. On the other hand, those who lived those events, whether Greeks or foreigners, fighters or intellectuals, acknowledge that had it not been for the Orthodox clergy Greeks would not have liberated themselves. One should never tire of reading the Memoirs of Nikolaos Kassomoulis, Photakos Chryssanthopoulos, Ioannis Makriyannis and so many other eyewitnesses to the events. One should never tire of listening to what the Greek people says by means of its folk songs. One should never tire of visiting the innumerable battlefields and places of martyrdom of Orthodox clergymen, Patriarchs, Bishops, priests, hieromonks, deacons and simple monks.

The Church of Greece endeavours a lucid and historically documented approach to the historical period of the Turkish Rule and of 1821 through a series of ten scholarly conferences, organised by its Special Synodical Committee on Cultural Identity. The first two Conferences have already been held and the Proceedings of the first of them, that of 2012, have been published in an edited volume. The tenth and last such Conference will be

held, God willing, in 2021, to mark the bicentenary of the declaration of the Great Greek Revolution.

From the Special Synodical Committee on Cultural Identity

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