

# Elder Joseph the Cave-Dweller and the Calendar Issue

*Bishop Klemes of Gardikion*



## Introductory Note

*Recently, certain New Calendarists posted material which is aimed directly against the Old Calendar Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece on the website of a well-known ecclesiastical news agency. Since the innovating ecumenists are currently occupied with the problems in Ukraine, it seems likely that there is an ulterior motive to this attack: namely, to discredit our Church in order to avoid any sympathy toward us on the part of those who understand the Œcumenical Patriarchate's actions in Ukraine to be uncanonical.<sup>1</sup> We do not detect any love or concern in our critics, who in their ignorance, delusion, or effrontery deal with us either disdainfully, to the point of insulting us, or at any rate with prejudice, one-sidedness, and willful confusion.*

*In one of these postings, a recorded homily by the New Calendarist Metropolitan of a border city, among other inaccuracies and errors in relation to the calendar issue and the Genuine Orthodox, reference is made to assertions, taken out of context, contained in a letter of Elder Joseph the Hesychast (1898–1959)<sup>2</sup> found in a recent publication by a well-known Athonite monastery. Realizing that its meaning has been distorted, we felt it would be a good opportunity to set matters straight by publishing a special article which we had composed a while back. In the letter of Elder Joseph to which our*

<sup>1</sup> An allusion to the formal recognition by the Church of Greece of the Tome of Autocephaly granted to the Orthodox Church of Ukraine by the Patriarchate of Constantinople on January 5, 2019 (New Style).—TRANS.

<sup>2</sup> The Patriarchate of Constantinople glorified him as a Saint on March 9, 2020 (New Style), and commemorates him on August 16 (New Style). For an account of his life, see ELDER JOSEPH, *Elder Joseph the Hesychast: Struggles—Experiences—Teachings (1898–1959)* (Mount Athos: The Great and Holy Monastery of Vatopaidi, 1999).—TRANS.

*accuser refers, no mention is made of any Divine exhortation to transfer his allegiance from the “Old Calendarists” to the Church of Constantinople, as the speaker erroneously asserts. The Elder was exhorted, rather, to move from the extremist Zealot faction of the so-called Matthewites to the moderate Zealots<sup>3</sup> sympathetic to Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Phlorina (1870–1955).<sup>4</sup>*

*Here is our article.*



Some years ago, several books were published by certain Athonite monasteries, as well as by a monastery in the United States of America, that touch on the issue of the relationship primarily of the highly-reputed and well-known Elder Joseph the Cave-Dweller, but also of Elder Ephraim of Katounakia (1912–1998)<sup>5</sup> and other Zealot Fathers of the Holy Mountain, to the Old Calendarists, to the end of establishing these monasteries’ overall position vis-à-vis the calendar issue. However, the manner in which this is done is in many ways confusing and deceptive, with the result that one draws the mistaken conclusion that the True Church of Christ is represented today by the Patriarchate of Constantinople, the ringleader in the heresy of ecumenism, and that those who follow the Old Calendar constitute a deviation!

This conclusion appears especially reassuring for that majority of Orthodox who have no desire to enter into a struggle for the Faith, even though the True Faith is what is in jeopardy. They prefer to acquiesce in error, with the excuse that since Elders of such eminence ended up in communion with the Patriarchate, all is well and we can happily relax, while rebuking all who struggle for the sacredness

<sup>3</sup>The Zealots of the Holy Mountain are those monks, and specifically Hieromonks, who since 1924 have refused to commemorate the Ecumenical Patriarch liturgically. As is made clear in this article, there is a spectrum of viewpoints among the Zealots, ranging from moderate to extreme.—TRANS.

<sup>4</sup>The Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece glorified him as a Saint on May 15, 2016 (Old Style), and commemorates him on September 7 (Old Style). For an account of his life, see B.C., “St. Chrysostomos the New Confessor and Hierarch,” *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. XXXIII, № 3 (2016), pp. 5–14.—TRANS.

<sup>5</sup>The Patriarchate of Constantinople glorified him as a Saint on March 9, 2020 (New Style), and commemorates him on February 27 (New Style). For an account of his life, see *Elder Ephraim of Katounakia*, trans. Tessy Vassiliadou-Christodoulou (Mount Athos: H. Hesychasterion “Saint Ephraim,” 2003).—TRANS.

and holiness of the Faith, which is so openly and shamelessly being betrayed. Contemporary Athonite “Neo-Hesychasts”<sup>6</sup> are complicit in this most deplorable collusion.

Now, how do matters stand?



Elder Joseph the Hesychast (*né* Frangiskos Kotes), who was from Levkes on the island of Paros, lived the monastic life, as is well known, from an early age in the desert of the Holy Mountain at the beginning of the third decade of the twentieth century and dedicated himself with great yearning to seeking the Divine mercy of the Lord Jesus Christ by way of ascetic labors, constant effort, vigilance, and noetic prayer. He was soon blessed by our Lord and the *Panagia* and received Divine gifts in the inexorable struggle for the purification and illumination of his heart. With regard to the Faith, he was very strict, as he was, moreover, in all aspects of his life. He chose the path of the Zealots as against the innovators and modernists in the Church and vehemently opposed the calendar reform based on the New Calendar of the Roman Catholics, which was illicitly, arbitrarily, and uncanonically adopted in 1924 by the



*Elder Joseph the Hesychast*

<sup>6</sup>The “Neo-Hesychasts” or “Neo-Athonites” are modern Elders, such as Archimandrite Aimilianos of Simonopetra (1934–2019) and Archimandrite Basileios of Iveron, who, while commendably repopulating the Holy Mountain with their disciples in the 1970s and thereby helping to ward off the danger of Mount Athos eventually dying out for lack of younger monks, have nonetheless failed to emulate their illustrious predecessors in taking a resolute stand against the ecumenist excesses of the Ecumenical Patriarchate. Ironically enough, the “Neo-Athonite” movement sprang precisely from the Athonite Hieromonks who left the Holy Mountain in the 1920s in order to serve the liturgical and spiritual needs of the Old Calendarists. These luminaries, who embodied in their lives the loftiest principles of the Philokalic renaissance inaugurated by Saint Nicodemus the Hagiorite (1749–1809) and his fellow *Kollyvades*, emphasized, *inter alia*, the importance of Confession and of the Jesus Prayer, both of which had largely fallen by the wayside in contemporary Greek Orthodoxy.—TRANS.

Church of Greece and the Patriarchate of Constantinople.<sup>7</sup> The young ascetic was an implacable adversary of this innovation, for which he could find no justification and which he condemned unreservedly. Indeed, he adopted the strict Zealot view regarding all those who had accepted it. In a letter dated February 1, 1929, addressed to his relatives according to the flesh, he urges them to eschew all ecclesiastical communion with the New Calendarists, since “they no longer possess any Grace.” He appears to have maintained this view in the ensuing years, although he gradually began to moderate it.

In 1936, Father Ephraim of Katounakia was ordained a Hieromonk by the Old Calendarist Bishop Germanos of the Cyclades (1864–1951), who had allegedly been deposed the previous year by the innovationist New Calendar Church of Greece for “Old Calendarism.” However, Father Ephraim was the serving Priest of the *Kalyve* of Elder Joseph, who was, as is well known, his spiritual guide and counselor, initially at the Skete of Saint Basil and, after 1938, in the caves of the Small Skete of Saint Anna. At the Divine Liturgies that he celebrated, as those dwelling in these sketes affirm, there was a manifest presence of Grace, succor, and consolation. Therefore, Father Ephraim was a canonical Priest of God, in spite of the “penalties” imposed by those in the New Calendar Church who were responsible for the schism and were themselves liable to canonical penalties.



*Elder Ephraim of  
Katounakia*

After Bishop Matthaïos of Bresthena (1861–1950) and Bishop Germanos of the Cyclades seceded from the Confessor-Hierarchs Bishop Germanos of Demetrias (1872–1944) and Metropolitan

<sup>7</sup> With the exception of the *Paschalion*, the method for reckoning the date of Pascha. The New Calendar in question is the Gregorian Calendar, named after Pope Gregory XIII (1502–1585), who mandated its use in the Roman Catholic Church in 1582. The New Calendar was deceptively introduced into the Orthodox Church as “the Revised Julian Calendar,” which is, in fact, nothing other than the Gregorian Calendar incongruously combined with the traditional Orthodox *Paschalion*.—TRANS.

Chrysostomos of Phlorina in 1937, Elders Joseph and Ephraim initially followed the extremist Zealots, participating in their written denunciation of the Confessor-Hierarchs.

When certain good Zealot Fathers of a moderate outlook attempted to convince Elder Joseph of their standpoint, he chased them away with some commotion. However, that night, during his customary vigil of prayer, he was unable to pray with purity. When sleep overtook him, he saw that he was on a small rock in the raging sea, and the shore, a large hill, appeared to be at a distance. He was then overcome with great anguish and endeavored to find a way to approach the shore and jump onto it in order to escape from manifest peril. He was eventually able to reach the shore, to his great relief. But he regarded this dream as a “sign” that he was not walking on the right path. While praying about the same subject, Elder Ephraim—as he himself affirms—heard a voice which said to him, “In the person of the Metropolitan of Phlorina you have denounced the entire Church.” They concluded that they were following an erroneous course and that the confessional stand and viewpoint of Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Phlorina was ecclesiastical and God-pleasing, and certainly not schismatic or outside the Church.

For this reason, in a subsequent letter dated August 29, 1945, Elder Joseph writes that he was concerned about a large Old Calendarist convent in Attica, because

they have seceded from the Bishop [*sc.*, Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Phlorina], whereas I am sure that they are all in delusion, as the Lord revealed to me. Aside from this, they are creating a schism to their own detriment, and for this reason I repented, having been led astray out of ignorance by the spiritual Fathers there, and yet sweet Jesus did not abandon me. Matthaïos and co., [Germanos] Barykopoulos, unfortunately, and all of them have fallen away, but may the Lord help them....

Therefore, albeit after the passage of several years (at least eight), Elder Joseph distanced himself from the extremist Zealots of the Matthewite stripe and followed, not the Commemorators,<sup>8</sup> but

<sup>8</sup>That is, those Hieromonks who commemorated the Ecumenical Patriarch liturgically (as the overwhelming majority still do), notwithstanding the doctrinal deviations of the recent incumbents of the Patriarchate, from Patriarch Meletios IV (1871–1935), the prime mover in the calendar reform, to the present incumbent, Patriarch Bartholomew I, in the context of the ecumenical movement.—TRANS.

the moderate Zealots under Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Phlorina Emeritus.

He confirms this a little earlier in a letter dated July 2, 1945, that is, that he “returned” to “our blessed Hierarchy,” Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Phlorina, after having previously believed, “out of ignorance” and under the influence of other Fathers, that the



*Saint Chrysostomos of Phlorina*

Confessor-Hierarch had supposedly betrayed the struggle for the Old Calendar. He says, however, that God indicated to him that he had made a mistake and that the secessionists under Bishop Matthaïos were in error and had created “a senseless schism to the detriment of their arrogant souls, since there is no other cause than their egotism....” He accepts, indeed, that it is possible for a man to fall into delusion out of ignorance about some subject.

The statements in this context, therefore—we emphasize once more—pertain to the Elder’s shift from an extremist form of zealotry to the God-pleasing form thereof, but in no way to a shift from one extreme to another, that is, to reprehensible communion with the ecumenist Patriarchate of Constantinople.



In several letters of his from the years 1948, 1949, and 1950, Elder Joseph touches, albeit occasionally and parenthetically, on the subject of the deviations of the Zealot Fathers, without making clear to whom he is referring, and at times, indeed, in a very vivid manner. With few exceptions, the majority of the Zealots were distinguished by fanaticism and by a lack of love and a want of fundamental concern for spiritual things. They made a dogma out of the thirteen days entailed by the calendar change and lost sight of the goal of genuine monastic life, namely, the struggle for purification and enlightenment through the virtues, obedience, humility, prayer, and also the Holy Mysteries.

For example, in a letter dated May 16, 1949, to a person of his acquaintance he writes:

I will send you the items [*sc.*, some goods] by mail. I am not sending them to you by hand, because I have obligations and I don’t want them to stop by and impede my stillness, for the monks of today do not have a refined spirit or noetic labor. They merely go through the motions. For this reason, they do not know what the soul is or how it ought to be purified and illumined and reach a more perfect state. They have learned a calendar and think that all of religion amounts just to this, while inside them the passions are seething: egotism, pride, self-satisfaction, vainglory, anger, condemnation, envy, backbiting, hatred, gluttony, greed, needling, carnal passions, and other things that I don’t need to enumerate. About all of these matters they have nothing to say and no concern—all they care about are the thirteen days of the calendar. That is why the Lord came down to us! Blindness and palpable darkness!

...And so I have shut myself in and don't wish to see or speak to anyone, but just weep over my sins....

It is clear that even a serious issue of Tradition or the Faith, if isolated and absolutized, cut off from the natural context of its function within the experience of a living faith in Christ, becomes a snare which leads to a variety of deviations. It is this that the Elder is criticizing as a most glaring deviation on the part of spiritually immature Fathers, and certainly not the calendar issue in and of itself.

For this reason, Elder Joseph and his *Synodeia* remained almost "cloistered," in order to maintain their hesychastic program, insofar as they were not of the same spirit as many of the Zealot Fathers, and that is why they endured misery and harassment from them: they reproached the Elder as one deluded, slandered him, opened the letters that he sent and received(!), *inter alia*, spied on him, and policed him oppressively.

The Elder writes in another letter, dated April 17, 1951:

Because I do not receive anyone, with no exceptions, and do not even want to hear how people or the monks here are living or what they are up to, I am the target of gossip and condemnation, and I do not cease day and night blessing the Fathers and saying that they are entirely in the right, that I alone am in the wrong whenever I scandalize them, for they see with the eyes that God gave them.

In another letter, undated (probably from 1949), he lists roughly ten problematic views of many Zealots, which constantly divided them, and concludes:

They are all separated, and they are all Zealots. Therefore, if we wish to lament them, we will need tears from the River Jordan. But I do not despair of anyone. The Lord will have mercy on them all, for such are our times, such is our era. Let us all be fools! Let Christ find the best of them. They all beseech Christ, they all call upon the *Panagia*. Their minds are suffering. So, to whatever degree, the Lord will have mercy on them.

In spite of this discerning and loving attitude of the Elder, it is clear that he suffered a rupture in his relations with the majority of the other Zealots, something which gave him no respite at all. This should be taken into serious consideration if one is to understand what ensued. There already existed spiritual dissension and a great gap in spiritual communication, consultation, and cooperation, *etc.* Nevertheless, the Elders still remained Zealots.

In a letter dated February 2, 1951, to a person known to him, Elder Joseph writes that he had a disciple ready for Ordination whom he wanted to send to Athens. However, he refrained from making a decision on the matter as long as the terrible persecution of the Old Calendarists by the New Calendarists under Archbishop Spyridon of Athens (1873–1956)<sup>9</sup> continued and as long as Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Phlorina remained in exile and the other Hierarchs of the Old Calendar Church remained in isolation. It is, of course, well known that the Old Calendarist Hierarchs were free to be together in the offices of the Holy Synod in Athens only in the summer of the following year, 1952!

In another letter, dated April 9, 1951, to the Sisterhood of an Old Calendarist convent, he delves very skillfully into the spiritual meaning of the persecution and into his recourse to prayer for consolation and assurance. He offers the following noteworthy admissions:

I was overcome by severe pain, pain and distress of soul above all for you, because I grieve for you, but we have all taken refuge in the consolation of prayer and found relief, and I am at peace. I saw that the Lord wills to save us through afflictions and torments. It is something hidden and unknown to us, but it is the Lord's will. That we don't like it is neither here nor there. Through warfare comes peace; through a storm comes tranquility. Without tribulation pure souls are not recognized, virtue does not become manifest, and patience is not discerned. Perhaps our own people [*sc.*, the Old Calendarists] have faults, and through tribulation they are forgiven. In the end, without temptations it is impossible for health of soul to become evident. This is the purifying fire that renders the soul pure and bright. Therefore, we need patience, and then the radiant sun will appear once more. Whoever wishes, let her pray earnestly, and she will find much peace and will know that this is the will of the Lord. When and in what way He will bring about the outcome is unclear. Perhaps tomorrow, perhaps after another conflict, perhaps earlier, perhaps later—in any case, we need patience. I have ceased to feel distress. I am praying and awaiting the outcome. So, have patience.

<sup>9</sup> He was the Primate of the Church of Greece from 1949 to 1956. Despite his administrative talents, he ruthlessly, brutally, and shamefully mistreated the Greek Old Calendarists.—TRANS.



In the end, however, Elder Joseph and his *Synodeia* returned to their monasteries and parted company with the Zealots in the autumn of that year, 1951, since in October the Elder's disciple, Elder Charalambos (1908–2001), who was from Drama and who had followed the Old Calendar from the time he was a layman, received Ordination from Bishop Hierotheos of Miletoupolis (1874–1956), who was sojourning on the Holy Mountain. Elder Charalambos subsequently became Abbot of the Monastery of Dionysiou and reposed in deep old age in 2001.



*Elder Charalambos  
of Dionysiou*

It is also written concerning Elder Ephraim of Katounakia that he yet again heard a voice while at prayer, telling him that he should go to the Patriarchate and not to the Metropolitan Emeritus of Phlorina. For this reason, at the beginning of 1952, Elder Ephraim began to follow the Commemorators, though on account of a disagreement with his Elder, Elder Nikephoros, he openly followed the Commemorators only after the latter's repose in 1973. Precisely when he received this "new assurance" is not clear. Perhaps it was during that period (the end of 1951).

However, what is perplexing is this: during an era of intense, unjust, anti-Christian, and, from every perspective, unacceptable persecution against the Genuine Orthodox adherents of the Old Calendar—when Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Phlorina was in exile in the Monastery of Hypselou (Saint John the Theologian) on Lesbos; when by means of miracles God was strengthening His heroic, persecuted faithful, including true Holy Elders who followed the Old Calendar while living in the world, including Elder Jerome of Ægina (1883–1966),<sup>10</sup> Elder John of Amphiale (1899–1966),<sup>11</sup> Archimandrite Eugenios of Piræus (1875–1961),<sup>12</sup>

<sup>10</sup> The Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece glorified him as a Saint on October 3, 2014 (Old Style), and commemorates him on October 3 (Old Style). For an account of his life, see PETER BOTSIS, *The Elder Ieronymos of Ægina* (Boston, MA: Holy Transfiguration Monastery, 2007).—TRANS.



*Saint Jerome of Ægina*

*Saint John of Amphiale*

and others, to withstand the fearful obloquies against them; and when Elder Joseph himself had received assurance in prayer a few months earlier, as we have mentioned, concerning the spiritual meaning of that persecution—how was it possible that certain ascetics and strugglers, who were so scrupulous in other respects, should have forsaken the struggle to confess the Faith and gone over to the side of the persecutors by commemorating them? How can this contradiction be accepted as supposedly coming from God? Was the need to obtain a Priest for the *Synodeia* of Elder Joseph so serious a reason for such a move? Did the grievances and bitterness arising from what was the largely and truly distressing attitude of many of the Zealot Fathers against them lead them to an inexplicable and compromising choice?

<sup>11</sup> The Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece glorified him as a Saint on April 15, 2018 (Old Style), and commemorates him on January 26 (Old Style). For an account of his life, see “Homily on St. John the New Almsgiver and Wonder-Worker, on the day of his Proclamation as a Saint, delivered by Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Attica and Boeotia at the Holy Convent of St. Demetrios, Amphiale, Greece” ([imoph.org/p/fw](http://imoph.org/p/fw)).—TRANS.

<sup>12</sup> He left Mount Athos to serve the spiritual and liturgical needs of the Old Calendarist faithful in Athens and was an ascetic of the stature of the Desert Fathers, wearing heavy iron chains around his body until his holy repose. He has not yet been formally recognized as a Saint.—TRANS.



*Elder Arsenios the Cave-Dweller*

*Eldress Eupraxia of Aegina*

Moreover, there exists testimony that when this turn to commemorating the Patriarch occurred, Elder Jerome of Aegina and Eldress Eupraxia of Aegina (1890–1990), his cell-attendant and the biological sister of Elder Arsenios the Cave-Dweller (1886–1983), a disciple of Elder Joseph’s, sent them protests with critical questions regarding this unacceptable action of theirs.

In some sources deriving from close or distant disciples of Elder Joseph’s it is mentioned that the change in the attitude of the Elders toward Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Phlorina and the Old Calendar Church came about because in May 1950 he and the other Hierarchs signed the notorious encyclical concerning the invalidity of the Mysteries of the New Calendarists and their Chrismation in cases of alignment with the Old Calendar Church. Yet this took place at least one and a half years previously, and the reasons which impelled Metropolitan Chrysostomos to take this action, following the repose of Bishop Matthaïos of Bresthena and in the context of his overall viewpoint and outlook, were in fact well known, as was the fact that encyclicals of such a kind had repeatedly been published by Bishop Matthaïos in the then recent past (1937, 1945, 1946, and 1948).<sup>13</sup> We

<sup>13</sup>“And if, only in a very particular instance—that of the notorious encyclical of 1950—there was an apparent contradiction of these views [*sc.*, the moderate

reckon that this incoherent and self-serving logic does not constitute a convincing explanation.

Whatever the truth might be, the fact is that what to us is a reprehensible “turn,” if it had been a matter of salvation, would have been the occasion for Elder Joseph the Cave-Dweller to hasten to persuade those nearest and dearest to him in the world to do the same, lest they “perish.” Such a thing, however, seems not to have happened. Several beloved relatives of his reposed while remaining followers of the Old Calendar, the most striking example being Eldress Bryaine of Amygdaleza (1924–1998), the Abbess of the Holy Convent of the Panagia Myrtidiotissa in Attica, whom he loved very dearly, whom we knew personally and the beauty of whose soul we admired, as well as her God-pleasing adherence to the Old Calendar.



*Eldress Bryaine  
of Amygdaleza*

It is important to emphasize that Elder Joseph was in that period expecting a great woe, some major war, which he assigned to the year 1953 (though, of course, no such thing occurred), on account of the apostasy that he observed in the world and also in the Church. In support of this opinion he invoked in general the “prophecies of the Saints,” from which we can understand that he

ecclesiological views of the Old Calendarist Orthodox under Metropolitan Chrysostomos], this was for the good purpose of healing the rupture—a goal which was not only not accomplished, but which indirectly gave rise to a distortion of Orthodox ecclesiology, not so much by reason of the admittance of Matthewites into the Phlorinite faction... as through the exploitation of the encyclical in question by those who distorted it, presenting this ill-considered declaration as, allegedly, the authentic view of Metropolitan Chrysostomos and blatantly ignoring his works as a whole, not to mention his practice (he never rechrismated anyone during the twenty years of his Episcopate in the Old Calendar movement)” (ΝΙΚΟΛΑΟΣ ΔΑΣΚΑΛΟΣ, “The Distortion of the Ecclesiological Views of Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Phlorina and Its Consequences: In Memory of Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Phlorina, a Struggler Betrayed,” *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. xxx, № 1 [2013], p. 39).—TRANS.



*Elder Joseph the Cave-Dweller and his Synodeia at New Skete*

studied the well-known “oracular” texts, which, under the names of Saints, circulated on the Holy Mountain during that period and also subsequently and assuredly influenced the minds of simple monks who were, nonetheless, virtuous in other respects.<sup>14</sup>

The Elder writes in a letter dated April 17, 1951: “I am expecting a great evil. Only a war will bring peace and make the wrath of God to cease. I am expecting it.” In another letter, dated May 29, 1951, that is, about a year after his “return” to commemorating the Patriarch, he writes the following, *inter alia*, to one of his relatives:

Let D. exercise patience for another year, so that we may see what emerges in our midst. I do not believe that the Church will be corrected unless war breaks out and burns up all of humanity. At any rate, it will erupt swiftly.<sup>15</sup>

<sup>14</sup> Known in Greek as “χορημολογιακά κείμενα,” these are collections of prophecies and oracles ascribed, often dubiously, to various Saints. Some of them date back to Byzantine times, but the majority are from the period following the fall of Constantinople.

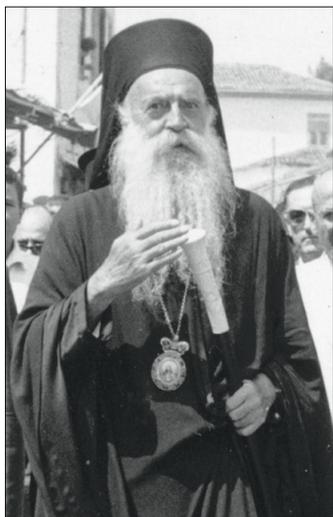
<sup>15</sup> Writing as he was at the early stages of the Cold War (1947–1991), the Elder seems to have in mind, here, some kind of nuclear conflict that would wipe out human life on earth.—TRANS.

The Elder, then, was awaiting Divine intervention for the “correction of the Church.” The matter was not closed but remained open in his mind. It required correction from God, because men were unable to resolve it.

As for his concession to the Commemorators, we can basically affirm that it was not definitive, was influenced by various factors, and naturally is not an example for imitation in terms of entering into or remaining in communion with the pro-heretical innovators or with the heretical ecumenists of Constantinople or Greece.



The Elder reposed, as is well known, on the day of the Dormition of the Theotokos in 1959—according to the Old Calendar, of course<sup>16</sup>—without ever learning anything about ecumenism. He continued to remain a fervent supporter of the Old Calendar until



*Patriarch Athenagoras I  
of Constantinople*

his repose, since even when he settled with his *Synodeia* in New Skete in 1953, according to the testimony of a clergyman who was a disciple of his, he forbade Priests under obedience to him to liturgize on Sundays if a New Calendarist clergyman were present. His disciples, as we know, were among the Athonites who, after 1964, were opposed to the now blatant ecumenist ventures of the Ecumenical Patriarchate under Patriarch Athenagoras I of Constantinople (1886–1972), which formed the basis for their subsequent ecumenical policy and course.

We are also familiar with what happened in the case of Elder Ephraim of Katounakia, according to the following testimony:

<sup>16</sup>This means that he reposed on August 15/28. The New Calendarists, however, commemorate him on August 3/16, transferring his commemoration one day after the celebration of the Dormition of the Theotokos, not according to the Old Calendar, but according to the New Calendar. This is a typical example of how confusing and disingenuous the use of the New Calendar in the Orthodox Church is.—TRANS.

Today, on Pentecost 1989...[Elder Ephraim of Katounakia] said that Elder Joseph had visited him in his sleep. After they had warmly embraced, Elder Joseph told him very joyfully: "I wish to entrust you with an ecclesiology." It was years since I had seen him so joyous. What is astounding about this event is that the Elder knew nothing of the word "ecclesiology."

On another occasion Elder Ephraim sought Divine assurance concerning ecumenism (according to one source, at the request of a certain Hierarchy): "A stench with an acrid, brackish, and bitter savor.... There! That was the result," said the Elder with abhorrence, regarding malodorous ecumenism! The question that arises is how he and those with him remained in communion with this malodorous entity.

It is roughly during that period that while in the United States of America, Hegumen Ephraim of Philotheou (1927–2019),<sup>17</sup> in response to an exhortation from the Mother of God, as he related, joined the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad, from which we Genuine Orthodox have Apostolic Succession and with which we were in communion. Unfortunately, after a short time he returned to the New Calendarist ecumenists, yielding to pressure from them regarding possible punishment and abandonment by his spiritual children.<sup>18</sup>

Nevertheless, prior to becoming Abbot of Philotheou in 1973, Elder Ephraim did not commemorate the Patriarch. In fact, during the years he was going out into the world from the Holy Mountain, he would commemorate at Divine Services the then First Hierarchy of the Church of the Genuine Orthodox Christians of Greece, Archbishop Auxentios of Athens (1912–1994). According to one account, Father Ephraim even received a laying-on of hands (χειροθεσία) from Archbishop Auxentios for this purpose. To be sure, he maintained a moderate ecclesiological viewpoint and practice, but this did not prevent him from belonging to the Church of the Genuine

<sup>17</sup> He was a disciple of Elder Joseph the Cave-Dweller's, one of a number of renowned Athonite Elders in recent times, and served as Abbot of the Holy Monastery of Philotheou from 1973 until his retirement in 1991. Beginning in the late 1980s, he established in the United States of America and in Canada an extensive network of monasteries and convents governed by an Athonite *typikon*, including most notably the Monastery of Saint Anthony the Great, in Florence, Arizona, the "monastery in America" mentioned in the opening paragraph of this article. These communities are, unfortunately, under the Ecumenical Patriarchate and hence are required to follow the New Calendar.

<sup>18</sup> See "Father Ephraim On The Russian Orthodox Church Abroad," *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. IX, № 1 (1992), pp. 17–18.—TRANS.

Orthodox Christians of Greece. What happened then? Did he “depart from the Church” and betray the principles of his Elder, as the “Neo-Athonites” would have it? Anything but that! It was at that time that he returned to the original path from which he had previously fallen. However, the influence of Elder Epiphanius of Athens (1930–1989) (the theoretician of the hardline New Calendarists) by way of his disciple Archimandrite Nikodemos, and subsequently the contribution of the governing body of Philotheou under the new ecumenist Patriarch Demetrios I of Constantinople (1914–1991), led him anew into an erroneous acceptance of communion with the ecumenists and New Calendarists.



In light of all this, we think that the unbiased reader can draw his own conclusions. We emphasize that the correct and God-pleasing path lies between the extremes: on the one hand, of reprehensible and malodorous ecumenism (and communion therewith) and, on the other hand, of extremist and indiscriminate zealotry.

The aforementioned Elders evidently attempted to walk this path but ultimately fell into unacceptable compromise. Their disciples have, unfortunately, changed for the worse in this regard. What is more, they are in no way justified in continuing their reprehensible course. They are still less justified in considering these Elders to be an example to imitate or in turning against those who maintain with consistency and at the cost of their own blood the *truly* Orthodox course, which is one of witness and confession amid unprecedented apostasy.

Would that all who have the ears of their souls open might hasten to make themselves genuinely Orthodox before it is too late!

*The historical material mentioned in the text (citations from letters, news, and communications) are from the author's archives.*

Translated by ARCHIMANDRITE ΠΑΤΑΠΙΟΣ ΗΓΙΟΓΡΕΓΟΡΙΤΗΣ from Ἐ.Γ.Κ., “Γέροντας Ἰωσήφ Σπηλαιώτης καὶ Ἡμερολογιακὸ θέμα” <imoph.org/p/6fz>.



## Church News



### Erratum

In our previous issue, we published a photograph captioned “Eldress Bryaine of Amygdaleza” (BISHOP KLEMES OF GARDIKION, “Elder Joseph the Cave-Dweller and the Calendar Issue,” *Orthodox Tradition*, Vol. XXXVII, № 1 [Winter 2020], p. 33). The individual in that photograph was, however, actually Abbess Kallinike of Sykaminon (1925–1998), who reposed the same year Eldress Bryaine did. We thank His Grace, Bishop Ambrose of Methone for pointing out our unfortunate error to us, and we apologize to His Grace, Bishop Klemes of Gardikion, the author of the article, and to you, our readership, for this regrettable lapse on our part.