

RESISTANCE OR EXCLUSION?

The Alternative Ecclesiological Approaches of
Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Florina
and Bishop Matthew of Vresthene



Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Florina (1871–1955)



Bishop Matthew of Vresthene (1861–1950)

Translated by
Hieromonk Patapios

Edited by
Archbishop Chrysostomos

CENTER FOR TRADITIONALIST
ORTHODOX STUDIES

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Introductory Remarks by the Translator

In this small volume, we present for the first time in English translation four important texts that illustrate the divergence in matters of ecclesiology between two prominent figures in the history of the Old Calendar movement in the Orthodox Church of Greece, *viz.*, Metropolitan Chrysostomos, former Bishop of Florina (1871–1955), and Bishop Matthew of Vresthene (1861–1950). The purpose of our introductory essay is to put these documents in their historical and theological context and to give the reader a clearer idea of the personalities behind the texts. Our hope is that Orthodox Christians in the West, especially, might thereby gain a better understanding of the Old Calendar movement in the Orthodox Church of Greece and better determine for themselves what its protagonists actually believed and confessed.

Since almost all of the documentation pertinent to this movement is written in Greek and is not, furthermore, readily accessible outside of Greece, those interested in learning more about the Old Calendar Church, unless conversant with Greek, are forced to rely on second-hand accounts and “histories.” These sources are, in many cases, not only of questionable accuracy, but are frequently written by apologists for one or another of the sundry Old Calendarist jurisdictions, thus, more often than not, rendering them somewhat tendentious. Our aim, here, is simply to offer the reader some guidance through the sometimes tangled thickets of the Old Calendar movement, presenting various historical texts in English and resting confident that the texts themselves will substantiate the reasonableness of our commentary thereon.

The Greek Old Calendarists. Let us first provide a survey of the Greek Old Calendarist movement from its inception, in 1924, up to the period between 1937 and 1945, when hitherto dormant tensions erupted into a bitter theological controversy. Secondly, we shall go back in time, in order to present brief biographical sketches

of Metropolitan Chrysostomos and Bishop Matthew, taking us up to the period of open controversy. In the third part of our introduction, we will elaborate on the salient themes of the four texts that we have selected, all of which were composed between 1937 and 1945, and highlight the controversies which dominated this period of tension. Finally, we shall resume our historical and biographical survey, starting from 1945 and concluding with the repose of Metropolitan Chrysostomos in 1955.

The unilateral imposition of the “Revised Julian (or New) Calendar” by the Hierarchy of the (State) Church of Greece, under the presidency of Archbishop Chrysostomos (Papadopoulos), on March 10, 1924 (Old Style), caused a rift in this Church that persists to the present day. Almost as soon as the calendar change was implemented, great numbers of the Faithful—many of them simple but very pious people, yet other individuals of no mean ability in theological matters and Church history—rose up in protest over what they saw as an unwarranted innovation that was alien to the spirit of the Orthodox Church. The “Old Calendarists,” as they were somewhat derisively called, resolutely refused to scrap the ancient Festal Calendar of the Orthodox Church, which is partly based on the Old (or Julian) Calendar, and adopt the Revised (or New) Calendar—which was imposed on the Western Church by Pope Gregory XIII in the sixteenth century—in calculating certain of the Orthodox Church’s Feasts. They reinforced their refusal to accept such an innovation by citing a number of Church Councils that had flatly condemned the Papal Calendar and defended the traditional “calendar of the Church Fathers.”

These resisters initially consisted entirely of lay people; then, some six months after the calendar change, two Priests returned to the Church Calendar.¹ They were thereafter joined by other clergy. In 1926, the newly-formed “Holy League of Zealots of the Holy Mountain” began to coöperate closely with what had come to be known as the “Greek Religious Community of the True Orthodox Christians,” which “saw to it that zealot Priests came from the

Holy Mountain to serve the religious needs of the people.” These Athonite monks played a pivotal rôle in the early years of the movement: “Summoned by the Community, they gladly consented to be put in charge of the holy struggle and to sacrifice everything for the sake of the unity of the Church and her return to the sacred traditions.”² The influence of the Athonite zealots left an imprint on the Old Calendar movement in Greece that can be seen even today, not only in the intensely sober spiritual life of its adherents, but in the heavy emphasis that it places on monasticism. Indeed, a great number of the present-day monasteries and convents found in Greece are institutions belonging to one or another of the Old Calendarist jurisdictions.

Although several Bishops in the State Church of Greece—most notably, Metropolitans Irenaios of Cassandreia, Germanos of Demetrias, Gregory of Chalcis, Chrysostomos of Florina, Basil of Dryinoupolis, Synesios of Thebes, and Basil of Drama and Philippi—protested against the calendar innovation,³ it was not until May of 1935, eleven years after the resistance had begun, that the Old Calendar movement itself received any overt Episcopal support. At the Divine Liturgy on the Sunday of the Samaritan Woman, May 13, 1935 (Old Style), in the Church of the Dormition of the *Theotokos* in the Colonos district of the city of Athens, at which more than 25,000 Faithful were present (with all of the Old Calendar Priests participating), the aforementioned Metropolitans Germanos and Chrysostomos,⁴ together with Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Zakynthos, officially and publicly declared that they had “walled” themselves “off” from the Hierarchy of the State Church. Metropolitan Germanos praised the Old Calendarist strugglers for their courageous endurance—since the adoption of the New Calendar by the State Church—of imprisonment, exile, torture, and all manner of hardships, and Metropolitan Chrysostomos of Florina then read an “Edict to the Pious Greek Orthodox People Concerning the Church Calendar.”

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